

STARS AND STRIPES®

**Va. Tech gives
Vick the boot;
QB to enter draft**

Back page



Marcus Vick

**Soldiers take
new Humvees for
a spin in Ramadi**

Page 4



**Sailor accused of
murder handed
over to Japan**

Page 6

Seaman William Oliver Reese, center

Volume 3, No. 271 © SS 2006 MIDEAST EDITION

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2006

Female American journalist kidnapped in Baghdad

Reporter abducted en route to meeting with Sunnis; translator killed Page 3

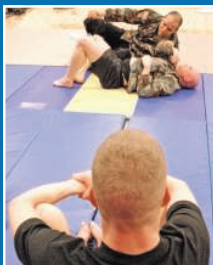
Right: 1st Lt. Frank Washburn, top, wrestles with Sgt. Orlando Gill on Friday at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington, D.C. Trainers from the Modern Army Combatives Program at Fort Knox, Ky., are in the midst of a two-week session of teaching advanced fighting techniques to wounded patients like Gill and Washburn, who sustained injuries in Iraq. Far right: Staff Sgt. Eric Hankins watches instructor Staff Sgt. John McHugh, bottom, spar with Gill.

Photos by
JOE GONZALEZ
Stars and Stripes



Wounded get new take on close combat

Page 6



Female American journalist kidnapped in Iraq

By PATRICK QUINN
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Gunmen kidnapped a female American journalist and killed her Iraqi translator Saturday in western Baghdad, an Interior Ministry official said.

Maj. Falah Mohammadi said the translator told police before he died that the abduction took place when he and the journalist were heading to meet Adrian al-Dulaimi, head of the Sunni Arab Iraq Accordance Front, in the Adel section of the city.

The neighborhood is dominated by Sunni Arabs and considered one of the toughest in Baghdad.

According to Samir Najim, a guard at al-Dulaimi's office, three armed men in a red Opel four-seater intercepted the journalist's car and shot the translator before taking her in their car and driving away. The kidnapping took place about 100 yards from al-Dulaimi's office.

Insurgents have kidnapped more than 250 foreigners in the past two years, aiming to force U.S.-led troops to leave Iraq or

prevent Arab nations from strengthening their ties with the Baghdad government.

Some of the hostages were killed while others were released after ransoms were paid or freed after Muslim clerics called the armed groups to release them.

On Dec. 8, the Islamic Army in Iraq claimed to have killed U.S. electrician Ronald Schultz. Other groups are holding a French engineer and four Christian humanitarian workers — two Canadians, a Briton and an American.

No news has been received

about the fate of those men since a group claiming responsibility for their capture imposed a Dec. 10 deadline for their killings. The previously unknown Swords of Righteousness Brigade had threatened to kill the group if the United States and Britain did not release all detainees in Iraq.

Briton Norman Kember, 74, Canadians James Loney, 41, and Harmeet Singh Sodhi, 52, and American Tom Fox, 54, were abducted in Baghdad on Nov. 26. All four were working in Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams, a

Canadian-based organization that has investigated allegations of abuse against Iraqi prisoners. Kidnappers last week released two men, a Cypriot businessman and a Lebanese engineer.

A total of 76 journalists and media staff have been killed in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003, the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders said Wednesday. That was more than the 63 reporters killed in the 1955-1977 conflict in Vietnam, the group said, citing figures from U.S.-based press advocacy group Freedom Forum.

Talabani: Government could form within weeks

By PATRICK QUINN
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's president predicted Saturday that a new government could be formed within weeks and said the country's main political groups had agreed in principle on a coalition of national unity.

He made the comments after meeting with visiting British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who said Iraqis remained optimistic about their future despite suffering through a particularly violent week that saw nearly 200 people killed in two days, including 11 U.S. troops.

The violence continued Saturday with a suicide car bomber blowing himself up next to an Interior Ministry patrol, killing one officer and wounding 11 people — including five civilians, Capt. Mohammed Jassim Jabr said.

A few hours later, gunmen fired on a civilian car in a northwestern Baghdad neighborhood, killing a woman and wounding two men, police Lt. Mohammed Khayoun said.

Meeting with Straw in Baghdad, President Jalal Talabani said Shiite, Sunni Arab and Kurdish political groups had agreed in principle on a national unity government that could be formed within a few weeks. Western diplomats in Baghdad have speculated that a government could be in place by the second half of February.

"In principle we are agreed to have a national unity government. Everyone is expecting to have it as soon as possible, but you know the devil is in the details," Talabani said.

He said it should be easier to form a new government than it was after the Jan. 30 elections, when it took nearly three months.



Iraqi police inspect the wreckage of a suicide car bomb Saturday in east Baghdad. The lone bomber targeted an Iraq soldier patrol, killing himself and injuring three soldiers.

"We are expecting within weeks, God willing, we will be able to form the government," Talabani said.

Talabani and other Kurdish leaders met over the New Year's holiday with Sunni Arab leaders from the Iraqi Accordance Front and with the head of the governing Shiite United Iraqi Alliance. The meetings in northern Irbil helped shape agreement on the general outlines of a broad-based coalition government.

"No doubt this government cannot be formed without the collective effort of the basic political entities," Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a member of the Shiite Alliance, said.

Al-Jaafari said increased participation of Sunni Arabs in the Dec. 15 parliamentary elections would speed up the process after "we lost three months" in January.

U.S. deaths in Iraq

The Associated Press

As of Friday, at least 2,194 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 1,720 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers. The figures include five military civilians.

The AP count is five more than the Defense Department's tally, last updated at 10 a.m. EST Friday.

The British military has reported 98 deaths: Italy, 27; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 17; Bulgaria, 13; Spain, 11; Slovakia, three; Denmark, El Salvador, Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand, two each; Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia one death each.

The latest death reported by the military: ■ A Marine and a soldier were killed by a suicide bomb attack Thursday near the Ramadi Glass and Ceramics Works.

■ Two Marines were killed by small-arms fire Thursday in Fallujah.

■ Two soldiers were killed when an explosive struck their vehicle Thursday in the Multi-National Division area in Baghdad.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

■ No new identifications.

On videotape, bin Laden deputy says U.S. lost war

By OMAR SINAN
The Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — Al-Qaida's No. 2, Ayman al-Zawahiri, said in a videotape aired Friday that the United States' decision to withdraw some troops from Iraq represented "the victory of Islam" and called on Muslims to attack oil sites.

Al-Zawahiri, wearing a white turban and gray robe and seated next to an automatic rifle, waved his finger for emphasis as he spoke in the two-minute excerpt aired by Al-Jazeera.

"I congratulate [the Islamic name] for the victory of Islam in Iraq," he said.

Al-Zawahiri apparently was referring to comments last week by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who said President Bush had authorized new troop cuts below the 138,000 level that prevailed for most of last year.

Rumsfeld did not reveal the exact size of the cut, but the Pentagon said the reductions would be about 7,000 troops, about the size of two combat brigades. The Pentagon has not announced a timetable for the reductions, but indications are that the force could be cut significantly by the end of this year.

"You remember I told you more than a year ago that the American withdrawal from Iraq is only a matter of time, and here they are now... negotiating with the mujahedeen," al-Zawahiri said.

"Bush was forced at the end of last year to announce that he will pull out his forces from Iraq, but he was giving excuses for his withdrawal that the Iraqi forces have reached a counterterrorism official, speaking on condition of anonymity in compliance with office policy, said that while the video appears to be authentic, it has not been determined with certainty that it is al-Zawahiri.

"Regarding your withdrawal timetable... you have to admit, Bush, that you have been defeated in Iraq and are being defeated in Afghanistan and will be defeated in Palestine," he said.

Report: Americans said to meet rebels

Stars and Stripes

American officials have begun face-to-face negotiations with some Iraqi insurgent leaders in an effort to exploit disputes between those factions and more radical groups like al-Qaida, according to reports from The New York Times on Saturday.

The newspaper reports that a Western diplomat, an Iraqi political official and several insurgent leaders confirmed the new negotiations. The diplomat told the Times that American officials have made contact with insurgent groups before, but the new talks have been much more significant.

No details of the discussions have been released, according to the paper.

American and Iraqi officials told the Times that disputes and firefights between Iraqi insurgency groups and al-Qaida have broken out in several cities in recent months across the Sunni Triangle, including Taji, Yusefiya, Qaim and Ramadi.

The diplomat told the Times that officials were encouraged by the involvement of Sunni Arabs in the latest Iraqi election, and hope to convince insurgent groups that the new government, expected to include more Sunni leaders, is worthy of their support.



MONTE MORIN/Stars and Stripes

SPC. Mac Pieper of Headquarters Company, 54th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade reaches for a tool while attaching gun mounts to a new up-armored Humvee on Thursday.

GIs get up-armored shipment

Factory-fresh Humvees a welcome arrival in dusty Ramadi

BY MONTE MORIN
Stars and Stripes

RAMADI, Iraq — It was Christmas all over again. A shipment of factory-fresh, up-armored Humvees lifted the spirits of more than a few members of Headquarters Company, 54th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade on Thursday as soldiers took the new vehicles out for a maiden spin.

"Don't be a doggone maniac," yelled Sgt. Azu Hamidovic, 32, a native of Bijeljina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and a company section leader, as soldiers revved their engines. "These are my babies."

Since the unit deployed to Iraq from Bamberg, Germany, roughly two months ago, they've been using a number of gun trucks loaned to them by the Marines.

Other companies in the battalion also received new wheels.

The site of a Humvee that's not filled from floorboard to trunk with a heavy layer of dust is a rarity in Iraq. When soldiers popped the locks on the vehicles and lifted the doors, they marveled at the spotless engines, pristine upholstery, shiny headlights and fully transparent windows.

"They'll probably look this good for a couple of days," said SPC. Mac Pieper, 26, of Garden Grove, Calif.

"They'll take a beating in those first couple convoys."

Even before they had removed all the padlocks from the vehicles and their instruments, soldiers had spray-painted black engineer castles on the doors as well as bumper insignia. The stencils had barely dried before they were taken out for a test spin.

"These guys could be having the worst day of their lives, and you give them a bunch of new vehicles and they're on cloud nine," said Capt. Gary Graig, 25, of Stanford, N.Y.

The vision of a parking lot filled with new Humvees didn't inspire joy in everyone though. SPC. James Davis, 24, of Dickson City, Pa., saw a cloud within the silver lining.

"Hoah — more vehicles to do preventive maintenance on," Davis said dryly. "I guess it's better to have them [than nothing], though."

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Better body armor might have saved troops, study says

BY ROBERT BURNS

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Most torso wounds that killed Marines in Iraq might have been prevented or minimized by improved body armor, a Pentagon study found.

The unreleased study last summer by the Office of the Armed Forces Medical Examiner looked at 93 fatal wounds from the start of the war in March 2003 through June 2005. It concluded that 74 were bullet or shrapnel wounds to shoulders or areas of the torso not protected by ceramic armor plating.

The findings underscore the difficulty facing the Army and Marine Corps in providing the optimum level of body armor protection in a war against an insurgency whose tactics are constantly changing.

Both services have weighed the expected payoff in additional safety from extra protection against the measurable loss of combat effectiveness from too much armor.

"In response to the changing battlefield conditions and as new technologies emerge, the Army continues to develop improvements to soldier protection equipment to enhance survivability and mobility," Army spokesman Paul Boyce said Friday.

Boyce said he could not discuss

details, but that U.S. soldiers' body armor is the best in the world.

"We take operational security very seriously and will not discuss in public sensitive issues that may render any insight to the enemy about our capabilities, fielding plans or tactics, techniques and procedures," he added.

According to a summary of the study obtained by The Associated Press, the 93 Marines who died from a primary lethal injury of the torso were among 401 Marines who died from combat injuries in Iraq between the start of the war and last June.

Autopsy reports and photographic records were analyzed to help the military determine possible body armor redesign. A military advocacy group, Soldiers for Truth, posted an article about the study on its Web site this week. On Friday evening, The New York Times reported in its online edition that the study for the first time shows the cost in lives lost from inadequate armor.

The study found that of 39 fatal torso wounds in which the bullet or shrapnel entered the Marine's body outside of the ceramic armor plate that protects the chest and back, 31 were close to the plate's edge.

The effort to bring back local law enforcement began last May with training for police in Fallujah.

Other places in Anbar didn't have the security environment needed to introduce police, Johnson said. "Now we are beginning to see where we have that environment, particularly in the western Euphrates River Valley."

A private U.S. defense analyst, meanwhile, predicted Friday that 2006 could be a strong year for the insurgency in Iraq.

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, widely regarded as an authoritative analyst of developments in Iraq, published a report asserting that to the insurgents, it must look "all too possible" to block the creation of a stable new Iraqi government and to force an early exit by U.S. troops.

Commander: Iraqi police to re-emerge in western towns in '06

BY ROBERT BURNS

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Local Iraqi police forces will be re-established this year in cities and towns across restive Anbar province, where the insurgency had prevented it earlier, a senior American commander said Friday.

Marine Maj. Gen. Stephen Johnson, the commander of Multi-National Forces-West, said in an interview with reporters at the Pentagon that this will be part of a broad strategy for bringing greater stability to western Iraq, bolstering Iraqis' confidence in their new government and undermining the insurgency.

If successful, the addition of local police also would lessen the security burden on U.S. troops, who are training Iraqi security

“The reintroduction of a professional police force in Anbar (province) will provide local leaders with the security and stability that they need to take care of their own.”

Marine Maj. Gen. Stephen Johnson

Commander of Multi-National Forces-West in Iraq

forces across the country so U.S. forces can begin to leave this year.

"The reintroduction of a professional police force in Anbar will provide local leaders with the security and stability that they need to take care of their own," he said over a satellite video link from his headquarters in Iraq. "These police will start to be introduced over the coming months in conjunction with the completion of their training."

The process is already under way in Fallujah, which was a

haven for insurgents until U.S. forces drove them out in a major offensive in November 2004. Johnson said 1,200 members of an eventual 1,700-man police force have been put on the streets of Fallujah, supported by Iraqi and American military forces.

Johnson called the Fallujah effort a success, although insurgent violence has not disappeared entirely. Two U.S. Marines were killed by small arms fire in Fallujah on Thursday; 10 were killed in an explosion on Dec. 1.

In earlier stages of the war,

local police forces in Anbar were disbanded because they were infiltrated by insurgents or otherwise corrupted to the point where U.S. troops had to take control of the streets or leave them unpoliced.

Anbar province remains a stronghold of the insurgency, along with the Baghdad area, although Johnson said the foreign fighters often cited by U.S. and Iraqi government officials as the most threatening are actually "very, very small part" of the insurgency. The vast majority of insurgents are local Iraqis, he said.

Attacks kill 16 at Pakistan border

BY BASHIRULLAH KHAN

The Associated Press

MIRAN SHAH, Pakistan — Assaults armed with rockets and assault rifles attacked a newly built checkpoint near the Afghan border in Pakistan before dawn Saturday, killing all eight security personnel, officials said.

Hours after the attack, an air strike on a home belonging to a local Muslim cleric along the Pakistan-Afghan border, about 30 miles west of the checkpoint, killed eight people and wounded several others, local residents said.

Pakistan's private Geo television said that U.S. helicopters landed in the village and took five people with them to Afghanistan, but offered no sources to back the report.

U.S. military spokesman Lt. Mike Cody said he had no reports of American aircraft bombing targets near the Pakistan border Saturday. Pakistan military spokesman Maj. Gen. Shaikat Sultan only confirmed the killings of security forces at the checkpoint and refused to comment on the attack on the home.

"There are reports about firing on a home, but I have no details, and this matter is still being investigated," Sultan said. Pakistan has said it would not allow U.S. forces to cross its border with Afghanistan to participate in any unauthorized military

operations, but some local residents suspected American involvement.

It was unclear if local cleric Maulana Noor Mohammad was killed in the attack on his home.

However, nine people, including several women and children, were injured in addition to the eight people killed.

One of the injured, Mohammed Shahid, 30, said he was awoken by the whirring sound of helicopters, and ensuing gunfire.

"I don't know who attacked our home," said Shahid, his arms and legs covered in bandages.

Later Saturday, Pakistani troops backed by helicopter targeted suspected militant hideouts near Miran Shah, but suspended the offensive after local elders asked for more time to find out the identity of the checkpoint assassinations.

Under a centuries-old custom called "collective responsibility," the government can punish an entire tribe if any of its members are suspected of harboring militants or if they are found to have attacked security forces.

The checkpoint that came under attack is located in a village near Miran Shah, the main town in Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal region, where Pakistan has deployed thousands of troops in an effort to flush out the Taliban, al-Qaida and their local supporters.

Germans distribute aid in Afghanistan



Rezia, a 9-year-old Afghan girl, carries a can of cooking oil offered as humanitarian aid by the German government at a refugee camp in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. About 100 families received sugar, flour, tea, beans, peas, cooking oil and coal.

Hostage's wife appeals for husband's release

The Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — The wife of a British hostage held in Iraq for more than a month pleaded for her husband's life in a videotape broadcast Friday on Al-Jazeera satellite network.

Pat Kember described her husband, Norman, as "a peaceful man who went to Iraq with his companions on a charity mission." She expressed her concern about her sick husband's health, pointing out that he did not have his medication.

Norman Kember, a 74-year-old humanitarian worker, was kidnapped Nov. 26 along with three other Western peace activists: Harmeet Singh Sooden, 32, a Canadian who lives in New Zealand; James Loney, 41, of Toronto; and Tom Fox, 54, of Clear Brook, Va.

The kidnappers, who identified themselves as the Swords of High-

teousness Brigade, threatened to kill the hostages if Iraqi prisoners were not released from American and Iraqi prisons by Dec. 10.

There has been no news from the kidnappers since then. Kember's family placed a series of newspaper advertisements in Iraq appealing for the release of the four hostages, and the Muslim Association of Britain has directed several calls for Kember's release.

The foreign hostages had been working in Iraq with Christian Peacemaker Teams, a Canadian-based organization that has investigated allegations of abuse against Iraqi prisoners.

Insurgents have kidnapped more than 250 foreigners in the past two years, aiming to force multinational troops to leave Iraq or prevent Arab nations from strengthening their ties with the Baghdad government.

Officer's abuse charges dropped

BY ALICIA A. CALDWELL

The Associated Press

FORT BLISS, Texas — The only officer charged in the Afghanistan prisoner abuse case will not face a court-martial.

Capt. Christopher M. Beiring of Dayton, Ohio, said Army prosecutors told him Friday that charges of dereliction of duty and making a false official statement have been dropped by Fort Bliss officials.

Beiring was in charge of a Cincinnati-based reservist military police company stationed at a detention center in Bagram, Afghanistan, when two prisoners died in December 2002. Beiring, along with 10 of his soldiers, were charged in the case. Four military intelligence interrogators from Fort Bragg, N.C., also faced criminal charges in the investigation.

An Army colonel assigned to investigate the charges against Beiring recommended last month that Beiring, 39, not face a court-martial in the case.

In a lengthy report about the case, Lt. Col. Thomas S. Berg said Beiring's leadership at Bagram may not have been perfect, but that he did the best he could despite being "sorely challenged at every step."

Beiring contended that he did the best he could in leading the reservists from the 377th Military Police Company, despite a lack of Army-provided training.

Four of Beiring's soldiers have been acquitted, while charges against two others were dropped before the cases were taken to trial. Two soldiers pleaded guilty and one was convicted by an Army jury. One soldier, Sgt. Alan J. Driver, is set to stand trial on abuse charges in February.

Beiring said he could still receive a letter of reprimand for dereliction of duty, but planned to fight it. In the meantime, he said he looked forward to returning to his Dayton home within the next week.

Jean Offutt, a Fort Bliss spokeswoman, said Friday evening that was unaware of a final decision in Beiring's case. All the prisoner abuse cases have been tried at Fort Bliss, just outside El Paso, Texas.

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British secretary: Iraqis remain optimistic

The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqis remain optimistic about the future despite suffering through a particularly violent week, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said during a visit to Baghdad on Saturday.

A spasm of bloodshed has killed nearly 200 people in Iraq in two days, but Straw said after meeting with President Jalal Talabani that efforts were going ahead to form a coalition government.

"My main message has been one of support for the stated policy of the political leaders to form this government of national unity," Straw said after the meeting.

He said it was only normal that there would be

complaints about the elections.

"In any democratic elections there people are really pleased by the results and others are disappointed, and that is called democracy," Straw said.

Talabani, a Kurd, said that Shiite, Sunni Arab and Kurdish political parties and groups had agreed in principle on a national unity government that could be formed in a few weeks.

Earlier Straw said the situation Iraq remained violent. "I was trying to avoid any kind of pretense about the situation here in Iraq," Straw, who is in Baghdad to press for a unified government, told Reuters Broadcasting Corp. radio. "It is very difficult. People are being killed by terrorism."

Sgt. Orlando Gill applies a chokehold to Staff Sgt. John McHugh, an instructor with the Modern Army Combatives Program.

PHOTOS BY JOE GROMELSKI
Stars and Stripes



Sgt. Orlando Gill



Capt. David Rozelle

Kitty Hawk sailor in Japanese custody

BY ALLISON BATDORFF
AND HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Japanese authorities Saturday took custody of a USS Kitty Hawk sailor suspected in the killing of a 56-year-old Yokosuka woman last week.

Seaman William Oliver Reese, 21, was escorted under a blanket, was escorted under Navy guard to the Yokosuka police station after Kanagawa Prefecture police obtained an arrest warrant from Yokohama District Court.

The 21-year-old Reese was arrested on suspicion of death through robbery in connection with the fatal beating Tuesday morning of Yoshie Sato, a Yokosuka city woman.

The Navy announced Thursday it was holding a 21-year-old Kitty Hawk sailor at Yokosuka Naval Base as a "possible suspect" in the homicide. Reese's transfer to Japanese custody was expedited under the provisions of the Status of Forces Agreement (SFA) and the 1995 and 2004 Joint Committee Agreements on Criminal Jurisdiction Procedures.

Transferring custody was "absolutely the right thing to do," Rear Adm. James Kelly, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Japan (CNFJ), said in a written statement Saturday.

It is symbolic of the outstanding relationship that exists between our two governments, the close cooperation that has been the hallmark of this ongoing investigation, and the relevance of the SFA."

Reese, assigned to the Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier in 2004, allegedly killed Sato by "punching and kicking her face and stomach in an attempt to rob her," according to the arrest warrant. He allegedly stole about 15,000 yen (about \$131) in cash.

Sato was found about 7 a.m. Tuesday bleeding on the first floor of a building near Yokosuka Chuo train station. She had been on her way to work in Yokohama, police said.

Sato died soon after in a local hospital from blood loss resulting from liver and kidney rupture.

"At this stage of the investigation, it appears that there are no other suspects," said CNFJ spokesman Cmdr. John Wallach. "But we're continuing to investigate."

Kelly said the Navy will "see the matter through to its rightful conclusion" and pledged "complete support and cooperation with all Japanese authorities."

"We owe our community nothing less," he said. Through the weekend, Navy personnel throughout Japan observed a mandated "period of reflection" that began Thursday. A midnight-to-5 a.m. curfew was set in the Yokosuka and Atsugi area for all Navy and tenant commands.

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Amputees hone their fighting skills

Fort Knox instructors teach advanced techniques to war wounded

BY LEO SHANE III
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON
Sgt. Orlando Gill's prosthetic leg didn't give him any problems in his latest rehabilitation session, but the trainers' punches to his head did.

The 11-year soldier without a lower right leg had no trouble keeping his balance until the first smack to his face. After a few quick moves he broke past the punches and grappled his opponent into submission, earning a few words of praise and a moment's rest.

"That wasn't too bad," he said, sitting dazed on the floor. "He didn't get me too bad. But that's gonna feel good in the morning."

Trainers from the Modern Army Combatives Program at Fort Knox are in the middle of a two-week session at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, wrestling and sparring with wounded patients to teach them advanced fighting techniques.

"These guys are as good as any students we have," said Jason Keaton, a civilian instructor with the program.

"It's generally easier for guys



1st Lt. Frank Washburn



Jason Keaton

missing a hand or an arm, because so much of close combat is in the hips and legs... I used to wrestle competitively with a guy missing a leg. So these guys can do anything."

So despite the patients' injuries, Keaton and his team twisted and tossed their students as if they were training for full combat tomorrow.

After an hour of submission holds, 1st Lt. Frank Washburn was exhausted and happy.

The 41-year-old already has returned to active status with his

New York Army Reserve unit, but has been a regular visitor at Walter Reed since losing half of his left foot to a roadside bomb in Iraq last summer.

"Guys over there are using this, and I'd like to get back there," he said. "I spent about six months there, but I feel like I got knocked out early. And it feels good to be using my foot, stretching out the muscles sewn up in there."

Capt. David Rozelle, who works with amputees at Walter Reed, said so far 25 amputee soldiers have returned to active duty after recovery.

Rozelle was the first.

He lost his right foot in Iraq in June 2003, but returned to the country for another tour of duty earlier this year.

"These kind of programs are designed to build confidence in the guys, to let them prove to themselves they can still do the same kind of physical training and combat training," he said.

Gill said he hopes to be the 26th to return to active duty.

He has a medical review in May, and if he passes physical requirements he could return to his unit, the 217th Field Artillery Battalion.

But for now he is working towards becoming a physical therapist for the military.

On Friday he became the first patient at the hospital to be certified as a basic instructor in the close quarters combat skills, after withstanding another series of hazymaneuvers from the instructors.

The trainers said they hope to certify more troops at the hospital this week, not only to help more servicemen in their recovery but also so they can leave behind instructors to work with future patients at the hospital.

E-mail Leo Shane at:
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MyPay account users won't get paper W-2s

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops and civilians using the Defense Department's MyPay system won't be receiving any tax records in the mail this year, officials said.

Last fall officials announced that users of <https://mypay.dfas.mil>, the finance Web site, would no longer supply paper records for things like leave and earning statements in an effort to prevent identity theft and save money.

Carol Garcia, spokeswoman for the Defense Accounting and Finance Service,

said that policy also applies to tax records like W-2 forms.

Anyone who has signed up on the site will not automatically receive a print copy of their tax records, she said.

However, Garcia said troops and civilian defense employees can request a paper version of the tax records through the site, if they want a physical copy as well.

"But they have to go into the system and turn that option on," she said. "They will not receive a paper copy otherwise."

Those who have signed up will be able to get their tax information earlier, all troops and civilians will have their information

available online by Jan. 21, while those receiving for paper copies in the mail could wait until February before they arrive.

Garcia said anyone who has not yet registered with the site can do so to view their information as soon as it's posted. However, those who sign up before their service's mailing date will not receive a paper copy of their W-2 in the mail if they register.

Users who previously signed up on the MyPay site and have forgotten their access code can request a new one through a link on the site's main page.

E-mail Leo Shane at: shane@stripes.osd.mil

W-2 release dates

Group	Available on MyPay	Mail date for non-MyPay users
Active-duty Army	Jan. 21	Jan. 27
Active-duty Navy	Jan. 21	Jan. 27
Active-duty Air Force	Jan. 21	Jan. 27
Active-duty Marines	Jan. 10	Jan. 16
Reserve Army	Dec. 31	Jan. 7
Reserve Navy	Dec. 31	Jan. 7
Reserve Air Force	Dec. 31	Jan. 7
Reserve Marines	Jan. 10	Jan. 16
Civilian DOD	Jan. 9	Jan. 21

Source: Defense Finance and Accounting Services

Some reservists to get back pay

Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — Reservists who worked for the federal government between 1980 and 2000 could have thousands of dollars coming to them, thanks to a court decision that awards back pay for weekends and vacations spent working for the Pentagon.

The Nov. 18 decision became final Friday when the government chose not to appeal.

About 200,000 federal employees are eligible for back pay under the decision; as many as 10,000 reservists currently serving in Iraq may be eligible.

Reservists who believe they may be eligible for payments must either hire their own attorneys to file their cases, or try to file themselves. The ruling does not expire, so there is no limit to how much time reservists have to file their claims, said Matthew Tully, a partner in Tully, Rinckey, & Associates.

For information on applying for a settlement, go to the Web site www.federattorney.com or contact an attorney.



LEO SHANE III/Stars and Stripes

Navy Chaplain Lt. Gordon Klingenschmitt, left, prays during an event outside the White House on Saturday. Klingenschmitt went on a hunger strike for 18 days to protest what he called limits on his religious freedoms. With him are Katie Mahoney, center, and Air Force Reserve Chaplain Capt. Imagine Stewart.

Navy chaplain ends hunger strike

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy chaplain who had pledged a hunger strike until rules were changed to allow him "to pray publicly in Jesus' name" broke his 18-day fast Saturday, calling his protest a victory for religious liberty.

Navy officials said they made no policy changes since the start of his fast, and disputed charges that he would have been dismissed if not for his public protest.

But Navy Chaplain (Lt.) Gordon Klingenschmitt said he was on the verge of losing his commission before he began the hunger strike and said he believes the Navy changed its policy to keep him in the service.

The chaplain had received poor reviews from his commander prior to the latest protest, which he believed was the precursor to his dismissal.

Along with that complaint, Klingenschmitt took issue with De-

"Today the Navy has reluctantly obeyed the law, to grant me the religious liberty I always should've had."

Chaplain (Lt.) Gordon Klingenschmitt

fense Department rules mandating nonspecific language in public, nondenominational events, and an order from superior officers prohibiting him from wearing his uniform during television appearances related to his protest.

Klingenschmitt had asked for the president to sign an executive order overruling those restrictions, but said a Navy memo affirming his right to wear his uniform in certain public events and use Christian-specific language

during certain instances satisfied his protest goals.

"Today the Navy has reluctantly obeyed the law, to grant me the religious liberty I always should've had," he said during a prayer rally outside the White House on Saturday.

The memo sent to Klingenschmitt specifies that sailors cannot wear their uniforms for media appearances without prior approval from command, but are permitted to do so for any legitimate worship services.

Navy officials said it is not a change in policy, and Klingenschmitt was not given a blanket order not to wear his uniform in public.

Officials also said that Klingenschmitt all along has been an active-duty sailor in good standing, with no disciplinary action pending, and has not received any punishment for language used in public forums.

E-mail Leo Shane at: shane@stripes.osd.mil

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IN THE WORLD

Bird flu fears envelop Turkey

Teen deaths likely to be first human cases found outside of Asia

The Associated Press

DOĞUBAYAZIT, Turkey — The European Union said Saturday that lab tests confirmed that an outbreak of bird flu in poultry in Turkey was the deadly H5N1 strain, but tests were ongoing to determine whether the same strain killed two teenage siblings earlier this week.

World Health Organization officials said scientists were closing in on identifying the virus that killed a 15-year-old girl and her 14-year-old brother in eastern Turkey.

"If it's confirmed, these would be the first human cases outside China and Southeast Asia," WHO spokeswoman Christine McNab said Friday.

The teenagers' 11-year-old sister died Friday of suspected bird flu. A fourth sibling, a 6-year-old boy, was hospitalized.

Preliminary tests in Turkey indicated the two teenagers died of H5N1. Scientists examining samples at a laboratory in Britain already have confirmed that the virus is in the H5 family and appear to be close to determining if it is the H5N1 strain, McNab said.

The teenagers' doctor said they probably contracted the illness by playing with dead chickens.

The strain has killed more than 70 people in East Asia since 2003. Authorities are closely monitoring H5N1 for fear it could mutate into a form easily passed among humans and spark a pandemic.

Birds in Turkey, Romania, Russia and Croatia also have recently tested positive for H5N1.

Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag said



Agriculture Ministry officials collect poultry Saturday in the eastern Turkish town of Dogubayazit, near the Iranian border. The number of suspected bird flu cases in humans reached at least 32 in Turkey on Saturday.

Saturday there was no reason to suspect person-to-person transmission in his country.

"There is no indication to suggest that we are facing a virus that spreads from human to human," he said.

Akdag was scheduled to travel to the affected region with a delegation from WHO, the EU and the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control.

A senior Turkish health ministry official said Saturday that two other people — patients at a

hospital in the city of Van — had also tested positive for bird flu, according to preliminary test results. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The two included a child reported to be in serious condition.

Turkey's number of suspected bird flu cases — people with flu-like symptoms who had recently been in contact with fowl — reached at least 32 Saturday. At least 20 people were hospitalized in Van.

Sharon's condition remains critical

The Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's brain scan on Saturday showed a slight easing in swelling and his vital signs are stable, but he remains in critical condition and his life remains in danger, a hospital official said Saturday.

Hospital director Dr. Shlomo Mor-Yosef

said doctors would decide Sunday when to take Sharon out of his induced coma to examine the extent of the damage to his brain.



Sharon

Asked what doctors would be looking for when waking Sharon out of his coma, Mor-Yosef replied, "We are looking for some sort of response. ... If there is no response, that would be bad news."

Sharon was admitted to the hospital Wednesday after suffering a debilitating stroke. He has since undergone surgery on two occasions to stop bleeding and relieve pressure inside his skull.

The hospital, which initially had translated the prime minister's condition as "serious," is now using the word "critical" for the Hebrew word *kashah*. The Hebrew term used has not changed.

In the first briefing on Sharon's condition in more than 24 hours, Mor-Yosef said the scan showed a "slight improvement" over previous scans, but stressed that didn't necessarily mean an improvement in his condition.

Jordan terror threat closes U.K. Embassy

BY BETH GARDINER

The Associated Press

LONDON — Britain indefinitely closed its embassy in Jordan on Saturday because of the danger of a terrorist attack, the Foreign Office said.

A spokesman for the office would not comment on whether there had been a specific threat against the embassy in Amman, saying only that the closure was prompted by the security situation in Jordan.

The Foreign Office also updated its advice for Britons visiting the Middle Eastern country to say that "terrorists may be in the final stages of planning attacks against Westerners and places frequented by Westerners."

Jordanian government spokesman Nasser Judeh would not comment on the reasons for the embassy closure but said that Jordan's security authorities had "studied information on the threat and did not believe that it warranted closing down the British Embassy."

"The Jordanian security apparatus provides the required protection to foreign embassies without any threat and in the event of a threat, steps up protection," Judeh said. "Britain took this decision. Jordan believes that the threat does not warrant closure of the British Embassy."

A Foreign Office spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with government policy, said he did not know when the embassy would reopen.

World Food Program workers load relief aid onto a U.N. helicopter bound for a quake-hit area Saturday in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan. The United Nations said it had suspended aid missions to two areas after survivors stormed two helicopters.



Relief halted to Pakistan areas after dozens storm helicopters

The Associated Press

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — The United Nations said Saturday it has suspended aid missions to two parts of Pakistan's quake-hit Kashmir region where dozens of survivors stormed two U.N. helicopters and forced an airlift out of the devastated area.

The U.N. said it canceled planned flights into Bana Mula and Leepa, both more than 60 miles southwest of Muzaffarabad. It was investigating the incident and evaluating the possibility of relocating villagers to lower-lying areas.

On Friday, more than 50 survivors forced the pilots of two U.N. helicopters to take them to Muzaffarabad and Abbottabad, a hub for relief activities. One air safety officer was assaulted, the U.N. said, without elaborating.

Pakistan, meanwhile, said it had prepared several contingency relief camps stocked with food to cope with any wave of refugees heading to lower ground during the harsh Himalayan winter.

Days of heavy storms have dumped up to 9 feet of snow in some areas of Kashmir and northwestern Pakistan, forcing the suspension of helicopter flights and aid deliveries. The Pakistan Meteorological Department warned of more snowfall over the next 72 hours.

"It's a bitter winter," said Maj. Gen. Khalid Nawaz Khan, the commander of the Pakistan military in Kashmir. "Things are being taken care of. We are prepared for any contingency."

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Syrian president denies threatening slain leader

BY MAAMOUN YOUSSEF

The Associated Press

CAIRO, Egypt — Syrian President Bashar Assad denied in an interview published Saturday that he had threatened the slain former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a charge lodged earlier this month by a former Syrian vice president.

"I am direct and frank. I don't know what others meant by threatening. This never happened and the aim was to connect the threat with the assassination. The game is clear. Nobody attended the last meeting between me and Hariri, therefore, how can they make these allegations?" Assad told the Egyptian weekly al-Osoba.

Abdul-Halim Khaddam, who defected to France, told The Associated Press on Friday that Hariri was threatened by Assad before his death in a massive truck bombing last year. Several anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians and reports issued by the U.N. team investigating Hariri's assassination suggested a Syrian role in the killing.

Khaddam said Hariri had been threatened by Assad when the two met to discuss extending the term of pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, which Hariri opposed.

Assad conceded Hariri's opposition to the extension, but said he told the slain leader he should not feel pressured and asked him to "go and think it over for one day or more ... and he agreed to the Syrian demand. He was not obstinate or tiresome, therefore, there was basically no problem and eventually there was no threat."

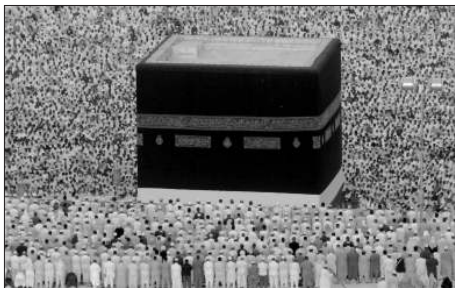
Assad accused Khaddam of being party to anti-Syrian activities even while vice president, but Assad said he never could prove it.

"I think he was involved in the planning long ago and he was a basic party to it, but until now, we don't have certain details," Assad said.

Assad told the interviewer he could not say who would have benefited from Hariri's killing, but he suggested Israel or unnamed Lebanese.

"I don't have evidence or indications, the beneficiary could be Israel, whether directly or indirectly. And there could be others ... certain Lebanese powers capable of carrying out this act. ... But I think the patriotic Lebanese powers are not involved."

Assad denied that there has been any connection between his country and the series of assassinations of anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians and journalists.



Muslim pilgrims pray around the Kaaba, center, inside the Grand Mosque, Islam's holiest shrine, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on Friday, two days before Muslims' annual pilgrimage, known as the Hajj, which begins Sunday.

AP

Pilgrims mix faith, business

Many vendors hawk wares to cover costs of Saudi hajj

BY SALAH NASRAWI

The Associated Press

MECCA, Saudi Arabia — Hawking elegant silk prayer rugs on a back street in Islam's holiest city, Sarajeddine Tartanoglu says he came to the annual hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia to mix business with religion because God helps those who help themselves.

"Earning your living is also worshipping. God will certainly bless you for your endeavor," the Turkish pilgrim says.

Many of the thousands of Muslims who have converged on the holy cities of Mecca and Medina say they sell their crafts at the annual spiritual gathering because it is a dandy business opportunity and a means to cover the increasingly high cost of making the hajj, a requirement for all Muslims able to undertake the journey.

But Saudis have started complaining about the large numbers of pilgrims who come to the cities with too little money for accommodations and end up living on sidewalks and in parks.

Thousands of travelers also overstay their hajj visas, some moving to other Saudi cities.

About 2 million pilgrims from around the world were expected to take part in the hajj this year. The pilgrimage officially begins Sunday.

Travel agents say the average cost of the hajj for those traveling tourist class and staying in moderately priced hotels is about \$3,000 per person, with some deluxe packages costing up to \$8,000.

Many poor Muslims — from countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Turkey and Yemen — forgo plane tickets and make the long journey in cramped buses or ships.

Throughout the crowded neighborhoods of Mecca, thousands of hajj pilgrims-turned-street vendors have set up shop, spreading out handmade crafts rarely found in city shops crammed with cheap Chinese or Taiwanese imports.

Russian Muslims offer prayer beads made of precious stones.

Nigerians and Senegalese sell wooden crafts. And Yemenis hawk pricey honey they harvest nectar only from bees that have grown at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

On Tuesday, a government-sponsored Islamic conference condemned the influx of poor pilgrims as a "phenomenon" against the teachings of the Quran, Islam's holy book, which stipulates the hajj is only a requirement for those who can afford the trip.

The next day, Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef publicly complained that many travelers are bogus pilgrims, looking for unlicensed jobs or places on the street to beg.

He said they would be expelled when discovered.

Despite the commercialization, the pilgrimage season still exudes spiritual peace and renewal. But it admittedly is a big business for the Saudis: The hajj is the kingdom's second largest source of income after oil, bringing in \$10 billion annually, according to the Mecca-based Center for Research and Development of Hajj Economy.

Collapse death toll at 76

MECCA, Saudi Arabia — Hundreds of men using cranes, hand tools and blow torches pulled bodies from the rubble of a four-story building that collapsed in Islam's holiest city, and authorities said Friday the death toll reached at least 76.

The Saudi Interior Ministry also said Thursday's collapse injured 62. The nationalities of the victims were not released.

The disaster marred the start of the annual gathering of millions of Muslims for the hajj pilgrimage.

More than 1 million attended Friday prayers in the Grand Mosque, which is just 200 feet away from the building that collapsed.

— The Associated Press

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Iran accuses U.S. of supporting kidnappers

The Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran charged the United States with supporting a militant group holding nine Iranian soldiers hostage, saying its members are pro-Taliban, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported on Saturday.

"The Americans use such groups against Iran since they could not directly approach Iran," the agency quoted Mostafa Pourmohammadi, Iran's Interior Minister, as saying.

Pourmohammadi said Iranian authorities have identified the group, which has demanded ran-

som and the release of its members from prison.

"The kidnappers are under influence of the Taliban," Pourmohammadi added. He did not say why the United States would resort to using Taliban-influenced radicals. Washington deposed Afghanistan's Taliban regime in late 2003 in reaction to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

On Thursday Iran rejected demands of the group to release its members and said it would not allow militants to blackmail the government and vowed to pun-

ished the kidnappers if they harmed their captives.

Al-Arabiya satellite network broadcast a videotape of the soldiers Wednesday and the news-caster said the militants, the extremist Islamic group "Jundallah" or God's Brigade, warned the soldiers would be killed if militant demands were not met.

A group using the same name is suspected of numerous terror attacks in Pakistan, but it was not previously known to operate in Iran. The soldiers were held in eastern Iran, scene of frequent clashes between the police, drug smugglers and bandits.

Merkel: Gitmo can't stand forever

The Associated Press

BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Saturday that an institution such as the U.S. military's detention center at Guantanamo Bay should not be allowed to exist indefinitely, but denied she would demand its closure during upcoming talks in Washington.

Speaking to reporters at a meeting of her conservative Christian Democratic party leaders, Merkel reiterated

a statement she had made in an interview to be published in Monday's edition of Der Spiegel weekly: "An institution like Guantanamo can and should not be allowed to exist indefinitely."

The German chancellor insisted the comment reflected only her personal opinion and said she would not insist that the center be closed when she meets on Thursday with President Bush.

"That is my attitude and my belief

and my opinion and just as I've expressed it here, I will express it elsewhere," Merkel said from the southwestern city of Mainz, where the center was held.

Unlike her predecessor, former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who angered Washington by refusing to support the 2003 U.S. war in Iraq, Merkel has cultivated closer ties with the United States. Still, she has insisted German soldiers will not be sent to Iraq.



Merkel

Woman dies after shark attack in Australia

SYDNEY, Australia — A 21-year-old woman died Saturday after a shark attack off eastern Australia, officials said.

The shark mauled the woman, whose identity was not released, while she was swimming Saturday afternoon near North Stradbroke Island, east of the Queensland state capital of Brisbane.

The woman was airlifted to a hospital where she had both arms amputated just below the elbow, Queensland's Rescue and Recovery spokeswoman Helen Anderson said. She also had flesh wounds to her leg and torso, Anderson said.

The woman died of her injuries while in the hospital, according to Queensland state police.

Snow trail



A woman makes her way through snow piled up at Tokachi, northern Japan, on Saturday. A powerful cold air mass dumped heavy snow, prompting prefectural government officials to request a dispatch of disaster relief units from Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force.

KYODO NEWS/AP

Iran, Russia begin talks on U.S.-backed nuclear proposal

The Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran and Russia began talks Saturday to clarify what Tehran has described as "ambiguities" in a Russian proposal that the two nations enrich uranium in Russian territory, state-run television reported Saturday.

A top Russian delegation held talks with Iranian officials about the Russian proposal, the television quoted spokesman of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Hossein Entezami, as saying. The council, Iran's highest security decision-making body, handles Iran's nuclear negotiations with the international community.

"The two sides are expected to discuss the Russian proposal about joint uranium enrichment (in Russia) and also uranium enrichment in Iran," Entezami was quoted as saying.

Iran has said it needs Moscow to clarify what it has called "ambiguities" in its proposal and has insisted that it won't agree if it denies Iran uranium enrichment at home.

The Russian proposal, backed by the Europeans and the United States, is aimed at getting Iran to move uranium enrichment completely off its territory to ensure its nuclear program can't produce weapons.

Enriched uranium can be used for nuclear reactors or nuclear weapons, depending on the degree of enrichment.

Tehran says its nuclear program is for electricity generation, despite U.S. and European concerns that it is moving to produce nuclear bombs.

The Europeans are hoping the compromise would foster a breakthrough in deadlocked negotiations aimed at ensuring Iran can't produce nuclear weapons. Talks between Iran and Britain, France and Germany, which resumed last month, have made little progress, but are to continue later this month.

Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.N. nuclear watchdog, Tuesday that it has decided to resume research into nuclear fuel production, a step that has only increased concerns in the West that Iran is moving toward production of nuclear weapons.

In Brussels, Belgium, the European Union told Iran on Saturday that if it resumes its uranium enrichment program, it may doom any further negotiations with the EU about economic aid and other issues.

"The EU views with serious concern ... Iran's intention to resume suspended nuclear activities," EU foreign and security affairs chief Javier Solana said in a statement. "It urges Iran not to take this step — at a moment when international confidence in the peaceful nature of [Tehran's nuclear] program is far from restored."

Freud hostages return to Italy from Yemen

ROME — Five Italian hostages freed after being held by Yemeni kidnappers returned to Italy on Saturday, airport officials said, and they were expected to be questioned by Italian investigators.

The plane carrying the former hostages landed at Rome's Fiumicino airport at 2:39 p.m., the airport's on-duty officer said.

The former hostages were to be questioned by investigators before flying home later in the day, according to Italian news agencies and Adriano Franceschetti, a spokesman for Rome's airport.

The three women and two men were freed Friday after Yemeni security forces on foot and in helicopters surrounded the tribal kidnappers' hideout and forced them to surrender.

Speedboat kills driver in Gulf of Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand — A Thai woman driving in the Gulf of Thailand was struck by a speedboat and killed Saturday, police said.

The speedboat fatally hit Chanida Wongthong, a 27-year-old programmer from Bangkok, said Lt. Col. Thanasak Sirisuphan of the Pattaya police station. The accident occurred Saturday near the island of Koh Lan in Chonburi province, 45 miles southeast of Bangkok.

The speedboat driver, Pramote Sawangsang, 39, continued to drive and was later arrested. It happened, Thanasak said. Pramote turned himself in to police later the same day and will be charged with neglect resulting in the death, he said.

Panel details lives lost in East Timor conflict

DILI, East Timor — A U.N.-sanctioned panel investigating human rights violations during Indonesia's 24-year occupation of East Timor found that up to 183,000 people were killed, disarmed or injured, and thousands of illnesses linked to the conflict, an adviser to the group said.

President Xanana Gusmao presented the team's 2,500-page Report. Truth and Reconciliation Commission report to parliament late last year, but it has not yet been made public.

From The Associated Press

U.N.: Horn of Africa at 'brink of starvation'

The Associated Press

ROME — An estimated 11 million people in the Horn of Africa "are on the brink of starvation" because of severe drought and war, with some deaths already being reported in Kenya, the United Nations said Friday.

People in Somalia, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia need food aid, water, new livestock and seeds, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization said in a statement.

"Millions of people are on the brink of starvation in the Horn of Africa due to recent severe droughts coupled with the effects of past and ongoing conflicts," the agency said.

FAO economist Shukri Ahmed said the region's dry season had begun and the rains forecast for March and April are not expected to be significant.

Normally, the herdsman of the area would

move from place to place for water and food for their livestock, but the recent drought had covered too large a swath of territory for them, Ahmed said.

"The whole area is affected," he said. "The situation is deteriorating."

The FAO is calling for domestic food purchases in areas where harvests are expected to be favorable and food aid imports elsewhere, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said at U.N. headquarters in New York.

The World Food Program is now feeding 1.2 million drought victims, "but fewer this figure could more than double to 2.5 million," Dujarric said.

The food situation in Somalia and eastern Kenya is particularly serious, the FAO said. Ahmed said local newspapers, citing Kenyan medical officials, have reported at least 30 famine-related deaths.

The government of Kenya has said its efforts to distribute food to famine-stricken areas in its north have been hampered by the nation's ethnic culture and poor infrastructure. President Mwai Kibaki has declared a national disaster.

In Somalia, the secondary rainy season from October to December failed in most of the eight agricultural regions in the south, "resulting in widespread crop failure" that could be the worst in a decade, the agency said.

Nearly 150,000 people in Djibouti — or almost a fifth of the population — are believed to be facing food shortages because of drought, FAO said.

In Ethiopia, food shortages have been reported in the east and south, even though the prospects for the current harvest were favorable, the agency said. It said more than \$40 million in aid was needed to stave off starvation.

IN THE STATES



Anna McCloy, the wife of Randal McCloy Jr., the sole survivor of the mine explosion in Taffmansville, W.Va., who remains in a medically induced coma, says she plans to play the music of her husband's favorite band, Metallica, in hopes of joggling him back to consciousness.

Final goodbyes begin for miners

BY VICKI SMITH
The Associated Press

PHILIPPI, W.Va. — As families and friends of 12 men killed in a coal mine explosion prepared to say goodbye, mine employees met with company officials for the first time since the blast.

The first visitations for the victims of the Sago Mine tragedy were scheduled Saturday, and six funerals were planned for Sunday.

Gov. Joe Manchin's office said he planned to attend the viewings.

"Having been with the families throughout these last difficult days this week, he felt a very close connection with them," spokeswoman Lara Ramsburg said Saturday. "He wanted to make sure he followed through on his commitment to them to be there for them."

Before the viewings, the 145 employees of the Sago Mine were meeting with International Coal Group chief executive Ben Hatfield for the first time since Monday's

Note gives hour-by-hour account of ordeal

PHILIPPI, W.Va. — A coal miner left a detailed note showing that he and other trapped workers were alive at least 10 hours after an underground explosion, a family member said Saturday.

The daughter of 61-year-old Jim Bennett, who was a shuttle car operator in the mine, said the note has three or four entries, the first coming Monday at 11:40 a.m. and the last, in words that trailed off the page, at 4:25 p.m., nearly 10 hours after the blast.

"Each time he documented, you could tell it was getting worse," Ann Merideth said. "Later on down the note he said that it was getting dark. It was getting smoky. They were losing air."

"He didn't know how much more time he had. But he wanted everybody to know to tell my mom that he loved her," Merideth said.

— The Associated Press

explosion to discuss when the mine could reopen and company efforts to find them temporary jobs.

"We're going to do our very level best to take care of our people," Hatfield said.

An eight-person team has been appointed by the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration to investigate Monday's blast. It killed one miner immediately and

11 more who were found nearly 42 hours later huddled together behind a plastic curtain erected to keep out deadly carbon monoxide.

The lone survivor found among those corpses, 26-year-old Randal McCloy Jr., remains critically ill in a medically induced coma at a Pittsburgh hospital. Doctors believe he has brain damage from severe oxygen deprivation.

Poll: Most want warrants required for snooping

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A majority of Americans want the Bush administration to get court approval before eavesdropping on people inside the United States, even if those calls might involve suspected terrorists, an AP-Ipsos poll shows.

Over the past three weeks, President Bush and top aides have defended the electronic monitoring program they secretly launched shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, as a

vital tool to protect the nation from al-Qaida and its affiliates.

Yet 56 percent of respondents in an AP-Ipsos poll said the government must be required to first get a court warrant to eavesdrop on the overseas calls and e-mails of U.S. citizens when those communications are believed to be tied to terrorism.

Agreeing with the White House, some 42 percent of those surveyed do not believe the court approval is necessary.

"We're at war," Bush said during a New Year's Day visit to San Antonio. "And as commander in chief, I've got to use the resources at my disposal, within the law, to protect the American people. ... It's a vital, necessary program."

According to the poll, age matters in how people view the monitoring. Nearly two-thirds of those between age 18 to 29 believe warrants should be required, while people 65 and older are evenly divided.

Party affiliation is a factor, too. Almost three-fourths of Democrats and one-third of Republicans want to require court warrants.

Cynthia Ice-Bones, 32, a Republican from Sacramento, Calif., said knowing about the program made her feel a bit safer. "I think our security is so important that we don't need warrants. If you're doing something we shouldn't be doing, then you ought to be caught," she said.

Scout leaders' lightning deaths found accidental

RICHMOND, Va. — The electrocution deaths of four Boy Scout leaders at the National Scout Jamboree last summer were found to be accidental, an Army spokesman said Friday.

"We'll be closing the case as an accidental death case," said Chris Grey of the Army's Criminal Investigation Command. "We found no culpability for criminal acts in the death of these individuals."

The Army plans to formally close the investigation within two weeks after an administrative review, Grey said.

Judge grants Padilla plea postponement

MIAMI — Former "enemy combatant" Jose Padilla returned to court Friday, but a judge agreed to postpone hearing his plea and deciding whether he should be granted bail.

Padilla's lawyers had asked for the delay, saying they needed more time to sort through the complex case. U.S. Magistrate Judge Barry Garber set a new hearing for Jan. 12.

From The Associated Press

Postage goes up Sunday

The Associated Press

It will cost Americans 2 cents more to mail a letter starting Sunday. First-class postage rises to 39 cents for the first ounce.

The increase follows legislation requiring the Postal Service to place \$3 billion in an escrow account this year. Another rate boost is likely next year to cover rising costs for the agency. Stamp prices last went up in June 2002.

Many rates, such as parcel post and advertising mail, vary by distance or whether the material is presorted. To calculate domestic and international postage rates, visit <http://ircalc.usps.gov/>.



These stamps will go into use when new postage rates take effect Sunday.

AP

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Officials: DeLay to quit House leader post

BY DAVID ESPO

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Embattled Rep. Tom DeLay decided Saturday to give up his post as House majority leader, clearing the way for new leadership elections among Republicans eager to shed the taint of scandal, two officials said.

These officials said DeLay, R-Texas, was preparing a letter informing fellow House Republicans of his decision. These officials spoke on condition of anonymity, saying they did not want to pre-empt the formal announcement.

DeLay's defiant, take-no-prisoners style had won him the admiration and respect of fellow Republicans, but his mounting problems cast a shadow over the whole chamber.

DeLay is battling campaign fi-

nance charges in Texas and was forced to step aside temporarily as majority leader last fall after he was charged in his home state.



DeLay

He has consistently maintained his innocence and said he intended to resume his leadership post once cleared. His about-face came amid growing pressure from fellow Republicans who were concerned about their own political futures in the wake of this week's guilty pleas by lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Missouri Rep. Roy Blunt, the

party whip who temporarily has filled in for DeLay, was expected to run for majority leader. Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, a former member of the leadership, is also likely to run.

Elections are likely the week of Jan. 30, when lawmakers return to the Capitol.

DeLay intends to remain in Congress, these officials said, and plans to seek a new term in November.

DeLay acted hours after a small vanguard of Republicans circulated a petition calling for leadership elections and citing DeLay's legal problems as well as his long ties to Abramoff.

Republican rules permit an election to fill the vacancy, and aides to Reps. Jeff Flake of Arizona and Charles Bass of New Hampshire said on Friday that the lawmakers' petition would

allow the rank and file to pick new leadership quickly.

"The developments with Abramoff have 'brought home the fact that we need not just new leaders but a course correction,'" Flake said.

Rep. Heather Wilson of New Mexico, a perennial election-year target of Democrats, said she did not want DeLay to return as majority leader.

And GOP Rep. Jim Ramstad of Minnesota said, "It's clear that we need to elect a new majority leader to restore the trust and confidence of the American people."

Until Saturday, there had been no public indication that DeLay, whose fierce devotion to conservative causes has helped nurture the Republican majority, was willing to abandon his quest to take back the majority leader's job.

But his longtime friend, Speak-

er Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., signaled he would not try to block the rank and file from acting.

His spokesman, Ron Bonjean, said the petition drive "is consistent with the speaker's announcement... that House Republicans would revisit this matter at the beginning of this year."

Hastert's hold on power appears secure. Several officials said he has been involved in discussions in recent days on ethics overhaul measures to be announced next week, part of a broader GOP attempt to minimize any election-year taint of scandal.

The maneuvering to succeed DeLay occurred near the end of a week in which Abramoff, the central figure in a growing public corruption investigation and a man with close ties to Republicans, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and several other charges in two federal courtrooms.

Poll: Public would prefer if Dems led Congress

BY WILL LESTER

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dissatisfied with the nation's direction, Americans are leaning toward wanting a change in which political party leads Congress — preferring that Democrats take control, an AP-Ipsos poll found. Democrats are favored over Republicans 49 percent to 36 percent.

The polling came as disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff pleaded guilty to tax evasion, fraud and corruption charges and agreed to aid a federal investigation of members of Congress and other government officials.

President Bush's job approval remains low — 40 percent in the AP-Ipsos poll, with only one-third saying the country is headed in the right direction. Bush also remains low on his handling of Iraq. "I just don't like the direction our country is going in," said Steve Brown, a political independent from Olympia, Wash. "I think a balance of power would be beneficial right now."

Republicans are watching the situation unfold with some nervousness.

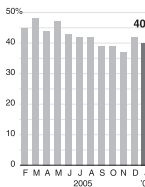
"Don't think there is anything the panic button," said Rich Bond, a former Republican National Committee chairman. "But there is an acute recognition of the grim environment that both parties are seeing."

"If the Democrats had any leadership or any message, they could be prepared for a good year," Bond said. "But in the absence of that, there have not been able to capitalize on Republican views. Because of the size of the GOP majority, Democrats have to be on the board, and I don't see that happening."

The public's unease with Republican leadership in the White

AP-Ipsos Poll Presidential approval rating

President Bush's overall job approval rating from a survey of 1,001 adults.



Margin of error ± 3 percentage points; poll taken between Jan. 5-6

SOURCE: Ipsos for AP

House and Congress creates a favorable environment for Democrats, said Democratic consultant Dane Strohmer.

"The problem is you don't vote for a party," Strohmer said. "You're voting for a member of Congress. And we're a year away" from the midterm elections.

About a third of the public, 34 percent, approves of the job Congress is doing, and nearly twice as many — 63 percent — disapprove, according to the poll of 1,001 adults taken Jan. 5-6. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3 percentage points.

In the Senate, 33 seats will be on the ballot in November, 17 of them currently in Democratic hands, 15 controlled by Republicans, and one held by Sen. James Jeffords, a Vermont independent.

Democrats now have 44 Senate seats, and need to pick up seven to gain a majority, six if Vermont independent Bernie Sanders replaces Jeffords.

All 435 House seats are on the ballot this fall, and Democrats need to gain at least 15 to become the majority party and take control of the House.

President to Congress: Renew tax cuts, temper entitlements

BY DEB RICHMAN

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Boosting that the economy is strong and growing, President Bush urged Congress on Saturday to save tax cuts from expiring and adopt the first spending restraints in nearly a decade on such benefit programs as Medicaid, Medicare and student loans.

In his weekly radio address, Bush said the federal budget faces the challenge of long-term deficits driven by mandatory spending on those entitlement programs.

"We do not need to cut entitlements, but we do need to slow their growth," he said.

Before leaving for the holidays, the Republican-controlled Senate passed legislation to cut federal deficits by \$39.7 billion.

The measure passed by the narrowest of margins, 51-50, with Vice President Dick Cheney casting the deciding vote.

The legislation, the product of a year's labors by the White House and congressional lawmakers, imposes the first restraints in nearly a decade in benefit programs.

"Congress needs to finish its work on this important bill," Bush said.

By passing the first reduction in the growth of entitlement spending in nearly a decade, Congress will send a clear signal that the people's representatives can be good stewards of the people's money."

The bill would take on, for the first time since 1997, the growth of federal benefit programs such as Medicaid, Medicare for the elderly and student loan subsidies.

It is part of a campaign by Republican leaders to

burnish their party's budget-cutting credentials as they try to reduce a deficit swelled by spending on the Iraq war, Hurricane Katrina and an earlier round of tax cuts.

Opponents said the bill will hurt the middle class. The GOP is advancing "an ideologically driven,

extreme, radical budget," Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said after the bill passed.

"It caters to lobbyists and an elite group of ultra-conservative ideologues here in Washington, all at the expense of middle-class Americans."

In his broadcast, Bush also called on Congress to make permanent all the tax cuts passed at his urging earlier in his administration.

Most are due to expire before or at the end of 2010.

With GOP leaders having had little success making the cuts permanent, the House and Senate are debating bills to extend some through the end of the decade.

Democrats particularly oppose extending the lower rates for capital gains and dividends.

"Some people in Washington said these tax cuts would hurt the economy," Bush said.

"The day the House voted for tax relief in May 2003, one Democratic leader declared it a 'reckless and irresponsible plan that will undermine opportunity in our country.'"

"Since those words were spoken, our economy has added more than 4.6 million new jobs for the American people," Bush said.

The president was referring to a comment made by House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., during a floor debate.

Dems: GOP leaders corrupting Congress

WASHINGTON — Democrats accused Republican congressional leaders of corrupting the government, claiming on Saturday that their party has higher ethical standards.

"Under Republican guidance, America has truly been put up for sale to the highest bidder," Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., said in her party's weekly radio address.

Congress was consumed this week by the corruption scandal around lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who pleaded guilty and is cooperating in a wide-ranging probe that could involve up to 20 members of Congress.

Politicians from both parties have rushed to unload donations from Abramoff or his clients, while others have decided to keep such donations, insisting they did nothing wrong.

Slaughter painted the Abramoff case as an earlier guilty plea by former Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-Calif., as part of a broader pattern of misconduct by lawmakers under the sway of highly paid lobbyists.

"Sadly, the legacy of Republican rule has been the fundamental degradation of our democratic institutions and the abandonment of our core principles," Slaughter said.

— The Associated Press



Abramoff

'Truthiness' tops list of '05 words

BY HEATHER CLARK
The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — A panel of linguists has decided the word that best reflects 2005 is "truthiness," defined as the quality of stating concepts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than the facts.

The American Dialect Society chose the word Friday after a run-off with terms related to Hurricane Katrina, such as "Katrina-gate," the scandal erupting from the lack of planning for the monster hurricane.

Michael Adams, a professor at

North Carolina State University who specializes in lexicology, said "truthiness" means "truthy, not facty."

"The national argument right now is, one, who's got the truth and, two, who's got the facts," he said. "Until we can manage to get the two of them back together again, we're not going make much progress."

The group of linguists, editors and academics agreed the most useful word was "podcast" — a digital feed containing audio or video files for downloading to a music player.

In a runoff for the most creative word, "whale tail," the appearance of a thong above the waistband, beat out "muffin top," the bulge of flesh hanging over the top of low-riding jeans.

Tom Cruise became the first public figure in the contest's 16 years to be noted for his influence on public discourse. The group coined the term "Cruiselec" to describe such terms as "jump the couch" and "Cruisizy."

"Jump the couch," meaning to disregard word or phrase, stems from the actor's antics in May on

Oprah Winfrey's couch as he talked about his love for fiancée, Katie Holmes. "Cruisizy" means to exhibit crazy behavior.

"I don't know any other public figure who has inspired so many words in a single year," said Erin McKean, editor of the New Oxford American Dictionary.

Other winners included "sudoku," a number puzzle voted the word most likely to succeed, and "pope squatting," the practice of registering an online domain that is the name of the new pope in order to profit from it, as least likely to succeed.

Last year's overall winner was "red, blue and purple states."

Teen dies in Fla. camp for juvenile offenders

PENSACOLA, Fla. — A 14-year-old boy died after officials said he had to be restrained by guards when he became uncooperative during the admission procedure at a boot camp for juvenile offenders.

Florida's director of Juvenile Justice said the state will investigate procedures at Florida's six juvenile boot camps because of the death of Martin Lee Anderson.

Anderson had just arrived at the Panama City camp Thursday and was doing exercises as part of the camp's physical fitness assessment when he became uncooperative and had to be restrained, said Ruthie Sasser, spokeswoman for the Bay County Sheriff's Office, which operates the boot camp.

'Railroad Killer' to be executed May 10

HOUSTON — Condemned serial killer Angel Maturino Resendiz, the Mexican drifter dubbed the "Railroad Killer," was scheduled to be executed on May 10 for raping and killing a Houston doctor.

Jack Zimmermann, Maturino Resendiz's lawyer, objected to Friday's setting of the execution date while a federal appeal is pending and blamed the killer's previous lawyer for not appealing in a timely manner.

But prosecutor Roe Wilson argued the appeals process could continue even with an execution date set.

Maturino Resendiz got the name the "Railroad Killer" because he was linked to 14 slayings in Texas, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky and Illinois near the rail lines he rode nationwide.

Tropical Storm Zeta finally gives up

MIAMI — Tropical Storm Zeta fell apart Friday in the open Atlantic, finally bringing the record-breaking 2005 Atlantic hurricane season to an end.

Zeta, which was never a threat to land, set one last record before strong wind shear and dry air robbed it of its wind speed and other characteristics of a tropical system: No named storm ever endured so long into January.

Texas mom in Houston to be retried for murder

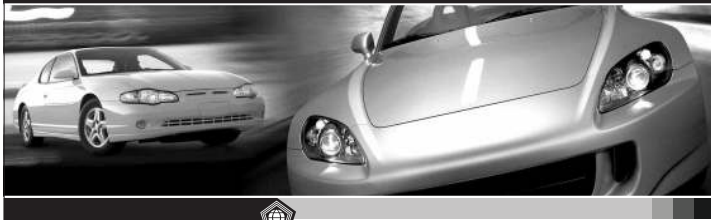
HOUSTON — Andrea Yates was released Friday from the East Texas prison where she's been jailed since 2002 for drowning her children and brought to Houston, where she'll have her first court hearing since her capital murder convictions were overturned last year.

Yates, 41, will remain in the custody of the Harris County Sheriff's Department until she is retried in the deaths of three of her five children. A trial date has not yet been set, but an initial court appearance is scheduled for Monday.

The First Court of Appeals in Houston overturned Yates' convictions last January because the state's expert witness, forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz, testified that television's "Law and Order" series aired an episode about a woman with postpartum depression who drowned her children shortly before Yates killed her five children. Such an episode never existed.

From The Associated Press

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Birth defects

A new government report contains what is regarded as the most reliable estimates yet on the prevalence of various birth defects.

Prevalence estimates of birth defects*

Down syndrome	13.65
Cleft lip	10.48
Cleft palate	6.39
Narrowing/blockage of the large intestine	4.81
Transposition of aorta and pulmonary artery	4.73

* Per 10,000 live births

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC: Down syndrome is more common

BY MIKE STOBBE
The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Down syndrome in the United States is more common than previously thought, at one case for every 733 live births, according to a new government report containing what are regarded as the most reliable estimates yet on the prevalence of 18 types of birth defects.

Previously, Down syndrome, a type of retardation caused by a genetic mutation, was estimated to occur in a range of 1 in every 800 live births to 1 in every 1,000. The report, released Thursday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, also found that cleft lip occurs in about 1 in every 1,000 births, and cleft palate once in every 1,500.

The report was celebrated by advocacy groups that help families affected by birth defects. They noted that the new numbers are based on statewide data, with previous estimates were derived from selected clinics and hospitals.

"Until now, there's been a real dearth of good, reliable, national statistics on Down syndrome," said Suzanne Armstrong, spokeswoman for the National Down Syndrome Society.

The risk of Down syndrome increases with the age of the mother, from an estimated 1 in 2,000 among 20-year-old women to 1 in 100 for women age 40. Many women are having babies later in life, which might explain the higher rate in the new study.

The new report presents statewide data for Arkansas, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah. It also has data from the metropolitan Atlanta area, and the Central Valley in California and a group south of Alabama counties. The statistics are for the years 1999 to 2001. The rates account for 22 percent of all live births in the United States each year and are a good representative sample, said Joann Petrini, a study author and director of the March of Dimes' perinatal data center in White Plains, N.Y.

BY VIRGINIA A. SMITH

The Philadelphia Inquirer

PHILADELPHIA — Janet Gildner calmly lay down on the train tracks and waited to die.

Soon she felt the tracks singing and the earth rumbling. The train was upon her. Then came foot-steps and shouting and the realization that she wasn't dead. She was still conscious, under the train, and half of her left leg was gone.

What Gildner now refers to as "the train incident" of 2002 wasn't her only attempt to kill herself, or her last episode of depression.

Knowing that, and knowing that antidepressants, talk therapy and shock treatments have given her nothing but temporary relief and unpleasant side effects, Gildner fears she soon will be in that terrible place again.

So she's trying a controversial therapy called vagus nerve stimulation, or VNS. It was approved in July by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for some of the toughest patients psychiatrists see: adults with "treatment-resistant depression," meaning their illness is chronic and they have failed to get better after trying at least four medications.

The device used in this therapy was approved for treatment of epilepsy in 1997, although scientists don't know exactly how it works to prevent seizures.

Critics contend there is not enough proof yet that it relieves depression. But for patients like Gildner, who has lapses into seasonal depression four times in eight years, VNS is well worth trying.

"I'm very hopeful it'll prevent me from having a relapse," said Gildner, 49, a telephone operator and receptionist.

In late November, she had the VNS device — a flat, round pacemaker-like generator measuring two inches in diameter — surgically implanted in her chest, above the heart. Thin wires inside it were threaded under her skin to the vagus nerve on the left side

Scientists say protein appears to regulate serotonin

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Scientists have discovered a protein that seems to play a crucial role in developing depression, a finding that may lead to new treatments for the often-debilitating illness — and fundamental understanding of why it strikes.

Although problems with the mood-regulating brain chemical serotonin have long been linked to depression, scientists don't know what causes the disease that afflicts some 18 million Americans — or exactly what serotonin's role is.

The newly found protein, p11, appears to regulate how brain cells respond to serotonin, researchers from Rockefeller University and Sweden's Karolinska Institute report Friday in the journal *Science*.

"We've all very excited about this discovery," said Nobel laureate Paul Greengard, a Rockefeller neuroscientist who led the research. "People have been looking for modulators of serotonin for a long time."

Said Oxford University pharmacologist Trevor Sharp, who reviewed the work: "This finding represents compelling evidence that p11 has a pivotal role in both the cause of depression and perhaps its successful treatment."

of her neck. The device was programmed to stimulate the nerve every five minutes for 30 seconds at a time. The nerve leads to parts of the brain thought to control mood, motivation, sleep and appetite, all critical areas affected by depression.

Using a gadget that looks like a wand, her doctor periodically adjusted the settings of the battery-powered device, made by Cyberonics Inc. of Houston. Using a special magnet, Gildner also can stop and restart it.

Studies suggest that if the therapy works, Gildner may not feel an effect for six months to a year. That may sound slow and iffy to the uninitiated, but Gildner and her psychiatrist, John J. Worthington, know what's at stake for her.

"These are people who are very frustrated. They've tried everything," said Worthington, who acknowledged that he is a Cyberonics stockholder.

But some advocates for consumers and the mentally ill are alarmed.

In a letter last May, Public Citizen, the Washington-based watchdog organization founded by Ralph Nader, questioned the effectiveness of the device and the soundness of the studies Cyberonics submitted to the FDA. Agency advisers also expressed concerns about the studies' methodology and data. At one point, the FDA rejected the VNS application — only to reverse itself in July.

Peter Lurie, a physician and deputy director of Public Citizen's health research group, said the studies lacked a comparison group and other valid research elements. The probability of a placebo effect — stemming from the therapy's novelty, the surgery involved, and the electrical stimulation — also was high, he said.

"I think a lot of people are going to have their hopes raised inappropriately, and they'll end

up paying for a device that almost certainly does no good and may well have some harms," Lurie said.

Cost of the surgery and the device can run \$40,000, and insurance companies don't routinely cover it. Possible side effects include voice alteration, hoarseness, shortness of breath, difficulty swallowing, coughing and neck pain.

Company studies showed no sexual dysfunction or memory impairment, and minimal sleep disturbance and weight gain, which are commonly associated with antidepressants or shock therapy.

Linda Andre, of the nonprofit Alliance for Human Research Protection in New York, called VNS "the latest money-making gimmick" designed to rapidly expand Cyberonics' market. Thirty-thousand epilepsy patients worldwide use its device; more than 4 million Americans suffer chronic depression, Cyberonics said. VNS is the only product Cyberonics makes.

Defibrillators move into homes

BY BILL RADFORD

The Colorado Springs, Colo., Gazette

If you've seen "ER" or pretty much any other medical show on TV, you've seen dramatic scenes of a defibrillator in action.

The paddles placed on the patient's chest. The shout of "Clear!"

The patient's body jumping as the shock is delivered to a malfunctioning heart.

The lifesaving medical devices are no longer restricted to hospitals and emergency work. They are in airports, sports arenas and other public facilities. And someday, proponents say, they may be in common in homes as fire extinguishers and smoke detectors.

Sudden cardiac arrest kills about 340,000 Americans a year before they can reach a hospital.

It strikes without warning and usually involves an abnormal heart rhythm called ventricular fibrillation that prevents the heart from pumping blood.

Although CPR can buy a patient time by circulating oxygen-rich blood to vital organs, it defibrillation — the delivery of an electric shock to the heart — that restores a normal rhythm.

Deborah Barron's husband, Jeff Huffmaster, died of sudden cardiac arrest after collapsing at his home on the day before Valentine's Day 2000. Barron, owner and operator of the American Heart Association's CPR training center in Colorado Springs, performed CPR on her husband while waiting for emergency help.

If there had been immediate access to an AED, "I'm pretty sure he would have made it," she says. The chance of survival from cardiac arrest falls about 10 percent for every minute defibrillation is delayed.

Today, Barron owns an AED and carries it with her at all times.

"I do that because I've seen where it could have been used and you never know, lightning does strike twice," she says.

She also takes it with her to show people how simple AEDs are to use.



Deborah Barron of Colorado Springs, Colo., right, is one of a growing number of Americans to keep a defibrillator in her home. All of her children, including Savannah Huffmaster, left, have been taught how to use it.

The device uses voice prompts to tell the user what to do, and the user can't shock a person unless the heart is in a specific, shockable rhythm.

Recently updated CPR guidelines by the American Heart Association support AED programs in public settings.

The grand prize winner of the Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch's 9th Annual Wacky Warnings Label Contest is this submission: a warning that consumers shouldn't use a heat gun that produces temperatures of 1,000 degrees as a hair dryer.

AP

Heat Gun Hot Air Paint Removal Tool Owner's Manual



from the supporting surface.
Do not touch the nozzle until the tool has cooled.
Do not use the heat gun as a hair dryer.
Tools and paint scrapings become very hot. To

Winning Wacky Warning

Super-hot heat gun is NOT to be used as hair dryer

The Associated Press

DETROIT — A warning that consumers shouldn't use a heat gun that produces temperatures of 1,000 degrees as a hair dryer has won an anti-lawsuit group's award for the wackiest label of the year.

The Wacky Warning Label Con-

test is conducted by Michigan Lawsuit Abuse Watch as part of an effort to poke fun at the United States' litigious tendencies and show the effects of lawsuits on warning labels.

"When judges see it as their job to dismiss cases that are rooted in frivolous theories, we'll see fewer wacky labels and more fairness in

the courts," said Robert B. Dorio Jones, the group's president.

The \$500 went to Tom Brunelle of Holland, who spotted the the heat gun warning.

The \$250 second prize award went to Jan Sander of Grand Rapids for a label on a kitchen knife that warns: "Never try to catch a falling knife."

The prize of \$100 went to Alice Morgan of La Junta, Colo. She found a cocktail napkin with a map of the waterways around Hilton Head Island, S.C., printed on it that cautioned: "Not to be used for navigation."

An honorable mention went to Kirk Dunham of Seabrook, Texas, for a warning on a bottle of dried bobcat urine used to keep pests away from garden plants: "Not for human consumption."

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GPS provides cops latitude in bank heist

The Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Bank staff tucked a global positioning satellite device into a bag of cash as they handed it over to a robber. Police tracked the device, quickly recovered the cash and arrested the alleged robber.

"You guys are good!" Thomas R. Fricks, 38, said as Spokane Police Officer Tim Moss arrested him shortly after the Washington Trust Bank branch robbery, according to documents filed in federal court.

Fricks, 38, was ordered held without bond Thursday by U.S. Magistrate Judge Cynthia Imbrogno. A Monday detention hearing was scheduled on a federal bank robbery charge.

Fricks told FBI agents he robbed the bank Wednesday because "of his inability to keep a steady job and his need to provide for his family," according to court documents.

During the robbery, a masked armed man herded three employees into the bank vault and threatened to kill their families if they didn't cooperate, the documents say.

A teller who was on the phone with her husband told him the bank was being robbed and to call police.

The robber threw a black duffel bag to another bank employee and said he wanted \$40,000, according to the court documents.

The employee complied, stitching in more than \$37,920 in cash — and the GPS device.

"The electronic tracking device, which had been included with the money, did function," allowing police to track the location of the fleeing getaway vehicle, the documents said.

Police recovered a black duffel bag containing a loaded BB gun and the missing cash from the minivan Fricks was driving.

Personalized plate proves prophetic

NE NORFOLK — Arlie Bichmeier discovered his license plate turned out to be an effective command.

Bichmeier's plate reads "FINDME," and thanks to it, authorities were able to locate him about 90 minutes after they say he tried to rob the Security National Bank branch in Laurel.

The suspect walked into the bank and indicated his intention to rob it, the State Patrol said. There was no weapon shown and the suspect fled the bank without any money, the Patrol said.

Witnesses described the suspect's vehicle as a 1994 Black GMC pickup, with a personalized license plate.

Around 11 a.m., the Patrol and Norfolk Police Department located a vehicle and suspect matching the description in a parking lot.

Bichmeier, 58, of Norfolk, was questioned and arrested. He was jailed on charges of attempted robbery and making terrorist threats.

Off-duty officer kills man outside bar

NY YONKERS, N.Y. — An off-duty New York City Police Department sergeant shot and killed a man who had stabbed another NYPD officer when a disturbance in a Yonkers bar spilled out onto the sidewalk, police said.

Peter Lee, 20, of Yonkers, staggered 50 feet into McLean Avenue and died after the shooting, said Yonkers police Commissioner Robert Taggart. The sergeant, 41-year-old Michael Ingram, told arriving Yonkers police that he had fired two shots into Lee "to protect the officer who was being stabbed," the commissioner said.

The injured officer, John Baumeister, 30, had three to five knife wounds to the torso and was in stable condition after surgery at Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx.

3 states replacing Lotto South game

VA RICHMOND — Like a tired mule whose best days are behind him, Lotto South is being retired and a fresh workhorse brought in to pick up the production.

The three-state lottery game, which began in September 2001, will be replaced in February by a new game that pays winners \$1,000 a week for the rest of their lives, Virginia Lottery interim executive director Donna M. VanCleave said.

Virginia's Lotto South partners, Kentucky and Georgia, also will participate in the new "Win For Life" game.

Lotto South is the descendant of Virginia's pick-six Lotto game, which began in January 1990. The games have sold more than \$2.5 billion in tickets and paid more than \$1.7 billion in jackpot prizes in Virginia, but player interest has waned in recent years, VanCleave said.

Bag of Wal-Mart nuts yields yellow condom

CO RIFLE — A couple who bought a bag of nuts got a surprise when they opened one and found a condom inside.



AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dian Geist of Silt bought a bag of unshelled nuts from an open bin at a Wal-Mart Supercenter. She said she and her husband, Brian, had a good laugh when a bright yellow condom popped out of one nut.

The couple took the fibert nut and its contents back to Wal-Mart, where an assistant manager photographed it before the Geists took it to police.

Police said someone had drilled a hole in the nut, emptied the shell, inserted a condom then plugged the hole with wood putty.

Police Chief Daryl Meisner said it appeared no crime was committed.

"The condom was new and unused, so it probably wasn't anything malicious. I can't find where any law has been broken," he said.

Scent may be used to tag lumber's origin

OR CORVALLIS — Timber researchers hope to create wood sniffers that could track lumber from forest to front-room furniture the way bloodhounds track criminals — by their scent.

The devices are still in the imagination of their developers.

They could allow the timber industry to certify that individual products come from woods managed in an environmentally sound way.

They could make it harder to move pirated logs, reducing theft and illegal logging. Or they could help the industry be better at marketing and management.

Glen Murphy, a forest engineer-

ing professor at Oregon State University, says he envisions an electronic "wood hound." Lumber would be tagged with scents such as the three perfumery chemicals he's been using on wood samples from cedar, ponderosa pine and hemlock trees.

So far, the \$8,000 device he's using can track one distinct scent, but it can't deal with combinations of more.

Five years from now, Murphy hopes to be able to track 25 aromas in various combinations. That would allow timber trackers to tag more than 33 million logs with a unique scent for each, he said.

Pearl Harbor fish may be poisonous

HI HONOLULU — A federal agency said people should not eat fish or crabs caught in Pearl Harbor because they may contain high levels of poisonous toxins.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry tested tilapia, goatfish, mullet and blue-clawed stone crabs caught in the harbor.

A person who ate 2½ meals of Pearl Harbor fish a week and three crab meals from the harbor a month would have high enough levels of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, to cause concern.

The finding echoes a 1998 state Department of Health warning that people should not eat fish from Pearl Harbor, the site of a major Navy base.

Med school accused of ignoring overbilling

NJ NEWARK — A New Jersey medical school, already weathering criticism over its management, is now facing allegations that university officials may have overlooked years of overbilling at a teaching hospital.

Officials with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey were told repeatedly as early as 1999 that the school's University Hospital in Newark had billing problems with Medicare and Medicaid, according to documents obtained by The Star-Ledger of Newark.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark is investigating the university and a federal grand jury has subpoenaed dozens of records and called university officials to testify.

Governor asks to keep wildland fire resources

AZ TUCSON — With drought conditions pointing toward a major fire season for Arizona in 2006, Gov. Janet Napolitano has asked federal officials to ensure that wildland firefighting and prevention resources remain in place and are not reduced.

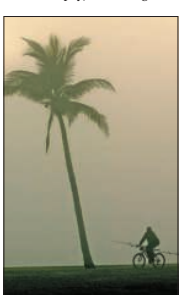
"As we head into 2006 and it becomes clear that these serious drought conditions will continue for Arizona and the Southwest, my concern about the 2006 wildland fire season grows," Napolitano said in a letter sent Dec. 30 to Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns and Interior Secretary Gale Norton.

The governor urged the two Bush administration officials to set priorities, plan and prepare for the fire season, "particularly with the key decisions pending before you in regard to allocation of resources."



Fly like an eagle

Alejandro Morales executes a jump on his skateboard at the Armijo Park in El Paso, Texas. The eagle is part of a mural titled "Entequia" by Carlos Rosas and was painted in 1976.



Gone fishing

James Miles of West Palm Beach balances his fishing poles on his bike as he rides through a foggy morning at Currie Park in West Palm Beach, Fla.



Battle of the swans

A trumpeter swan gets territorial on a fellow swan in Flesher Creek in Sacajawea Park in Livingston, Mont. During winter months, trumpeters pair up in preparation for breeding.



Three Kings Day

Students from Cristo Mayo High School — Matthew Anderson, second left, Oliver Hernandez, center, and Ezequiel Reyes, second right — dress in costumes as they march in the Three Kings Day Parade in East Harlem, N.Y.



Lost in snow

A woman tightly bundled against the elements walks through a snowstorm on Lisbon Street in Lewiston, Maine.



Blazing chimney

Bartlett Fire Department Capt. Alex Rowe, top, along with Chris Howard, attack the flames from atop a ladder truck during a chimney fire at the Eagle Mountain House in Jackson, N.H.



Iditarod training

With her 14 dog team, Rachael Sedoris of Alfalfa, Ore., begins a sled-dog training event at Mount Bachelor, Ore. Sedoris, who is legally blind, helped organize the 300-mile training run as she prepares for the Iditarod sled-dog race in Alaska in March.

Death penalty may be put on hold for study

NJ TRENTON — The Assembly Judiciary Committee approved a bill that would suspend the death penalty for a year while a panel studies the fairness and the cost of imposing the penalty.

The full Assembly is scheduled to consider the measure Monday, the last day of the legislative session. The Senate already passed the death penalty moratorium bill, and Gov. Corbett indicated he would sign it.

Sleeping on job? Nuclear plant under investigation

NC RALEIGH — The Nuclear Regulatory Commission plans to investigate allegations of poor security at a Progress Energy-owned power plant. A nuclear watchdog group, N.C. Waste Awareness and Reduction Network, filed a complaint last month alleging guards worked while injured, slept during shifts and cheated on licensing tests. Progress Energy said the plant is safe.

State: Readiness hurt by equipment shortage

NE OMAHA — The state's adjutant general says the Nebraska National Guard's readiness for war is being hurt by shortages of up-to-date equipment, most of which is in Iraq. Maj. Gen. Roger Lempe said the shortage keeps Nebraska Guard members from having enough current equipment to train with. He said that hurts recruiting and retention efforts.

Bet called in: State rounds up bookmakers

RI SCITUATE — State police said they broke up a mob-connected gambling ring that collected over \$3 million a month in illegal sports wagers. More than 20 people were arrested, and 16 were charged with both racketeering and bookmaking. Col. Steven Pore said police believed those charged were paying the Patriarca crime family, which controls organized crime in much of New England.

Anti-intelligent design lawyers go west

KS LAWRENCE — Attorneys who blocked intelligent design from being taught in Dover, Pa., schools plan to participate in a forum in Kansas. Eric Rothschild and Stephen G. Harvey, who argued the case in which a federal judge ruled that intelligent design is repackaged creationism, will appear Jan. 28 at the University of Kansas. State officials haven't endorsed intelligent design but did change science standards to include more criticism of evolution.

Workers get wish, inquiry into comp claims

WA YAKIMA — The state Department of Labor and Industries has hired a Seattle audit and consulting firm to review how workers' compensation claims are handled at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

The review follows complaints by workers last year that their claims were being mishandled by

the Texas-based company hired to oversee the workers' compensation program for the U.S. Department of Energy, which manages cleanup at the highly contaminated Hanford site.

The auditing firm Miller & Miller will begin a three-month review of the program beginning this month, with a final report due March 31. The results of the audit and any recommendations will be presented at a public meeting in early April, L&I said in a statement. The 586-square-mile Hanford site was created in the 1940s as part of the top-secret Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb.

Today, it is the nation's most contaminated nuclear site, with cleanup costs expected to total \$50 billion to \$60 billion.

State's schools deemed just about average

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah educational policy was given a C-plus grade, the same as the average state received in a national study.

The report was released by the publication Education Week. Utah ranked below average in efforts to improve teacher quality. It was awarded a B-plus in the area of resource equity.

Mares to gallop in, 19 other horses to stroll out

NV LAS VEGAS — The Bureau of Land Management said it plans this year to remove 19 of 35 wild horses that roam Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area in southern Nevada.

The agency said it would add four mares to the herd next year from the BLM's Wheeler Pass Herd Management Area.

It called the actions would help remaining animals find food in an area damaged by wildfire last summer.

"Reducing the herd size would not only ensure forage for the remaining herd, but protect reseeded efforts in the burned area," a BLM statement said.

The bureau plans a public meeting Jan. 12 in Las Vegas and will accept comments through Jan. 27 on the roundup plan and a preliminary environmental impact.

The proposal is expected to draw criticism from wild horse enthusiasts. Laurie Howard, spokeswoman for the National Wild Horse Association, said past experience with Red Rock roundups led her to doubt the BLM plan.

"The problem is the BLM says they're going to reintroduce mares. However, they're talking about doing that down the line," Howard said.

Conference focuses on meth and children

WY CASPER — More than 700 people turned out at the third Wyoming Methamphetamine Conference. Discussion focused on meth's effects on children and strategies for keeping them away from the drug.

Children are exposed whenever users smoke the drug, experts said. A local dentist said his clinic has run out of funds dealing with people suffering from "meth mouth," or rotting teeth and gums.

Stories and photos from wire services

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A cartoon by Phil Witte. A woman is depicted wearing a Roman-style helmet with a crest and a decorative band. She is also wearing armor with a circular emblem on the chest and a chain around her neck. She has a speech bubble that says "BUMMER NOT MY THING. NOT MY BAG." and another speech bubble that says "SIR? ANOTHER DISASTER." The cartoon is signed "Phil Witte" in the bottom right corner.

STARS AND STRIPES WEB SITE: WWW.STRIPES.COM

OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Despite deaths, hope endures
The Dallas Morning News

Here's what we know: We know that misinformation gave the families and friends of trapped miners in West Virginia three hours of cruel and false hope in Wednesday's week hours.

What we can't imagine are the feelings of outrage and hopelessness that must have come when what seemed like a miracle was exposed as a mirage.

With information rarely more than seconds away on demand, many Americans saw the late-night reports of an apparent rescue — only to awaken to the cold truth: Twelve miners had perished, and only one made it out alive.

How did the early reports have it so wrong? The company has its explanation about radios and codes and whatnot. But it ignores a significant piece of the story: hope.

When the misinformation made it through the line, hope trumped reason, and, sadly, erroneous reports were repeated to the families of the miners and then to the American public.

It's only natural that people believe the best and reserve doubt for the bad. And, someone eager to help as a society, we spread "news." Neighbors forward an e-mail that teaches a lesson without questioning its validity. Friends repeat "facts" that support our own, or party or our candidate, without consulting sources.

We devour information so quickly that we sometimes forget to chew — and to consider what we don't know.

We know that it is our shared humanity that makes our hearts ache to help for those who lost their loved ones. ... And, of course, it is our human nature that gives us that amazing ability to hope.

What forced recitation means
The Gainesville (Fla.) Sun

Otherwise-patriotic Americans — some of them, anyhow — seem to have a blind spot about the Pledge of Allegiance.

On one hand, they think the pledge is a terrific affirmation of the love and devotion they feel for their country. On the other hand, they think that dissenters should be compelled to agree — even if it deprives them of a tiny bit of their "liberty and justice for all."

We shouldn't have to be arguing about this in 2006, but the issue still arises — usually edged on by opportunistic politicians — with a disturbing frequency.

The latest incident is in Palm Beach County, where a 17-year-old junior at Boynton Beach High School wants the American Civil Liberties Union to help him press a grievance against the school administration. The student, Cameron Frazier, says his math teacher berated him publicly for refusing to stand and recite the pledge without exemptions.

Although state law may support the school, long-settled case law is to the contrary.

Back in 1943, in the midst of World War II, anti-patriotism was at a peak, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a 6-3 decision declaring unconstitutional a West Virginia law requiring all public school students to salute the American flag and recite the pledge each day. The law was challenged on religious grounds by some Jehovah's Witnesses. ...

We see nothing wrong with incorporating the Pledge of Allegiance into school routine. It serves as a useful reminder of the unique nature of our country and the free-

STATE OF THE UNION



"PRACTICE VISUALIZATION. BE IMAGINATIVE. NO GOAL IS TOO AMBITIOUS." LET'S GIVE IT A TRY.



doms we enjoy. But making the recitation mandatory, or subjecting dissenters to punishment or official ostracism — is a blow to those freedoms.

By the way, the issue in this case has nothing to do with the phrase "under God," which was added to the pledge in the 1950s.

That was when the U.S. was in the midst of its Cold War struggle against "godless communism" — and long after the 1943 decision written by Jackson. Litigation continued to swirl around that subject because of the implications of state-sponsored religion.

Karzai fights on many fronts
The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch

Afghanistan is an interesting incubator for democracy, perhaps more of a challenge than Iraq, which gets more of the world's attention.

In the past three decades, the nation has suffered war, military takeovers, Soviet occupation and a repressive Taliban regime that backed international terrorism.

"The nation has a democratic parliament for the first time in 33 years, but about half of the 249 elected members of the lower house of the National Assembly are regional warlords. ...

Elected councils in Afghanistan's provinces appointed two-thirds of the 102 members of the upper house, while President Hamid Karzai appointed the other 34 members. ...

Karzai's challenges are daunting. He needs to win the support of parliamentarians, many of whom opposed his efforts to build a democracy. With the help of U.S. and NATO troops, coalition forces will have to quell the rebels. Karzai will have to obtain concessions from ethnic groups such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras to get cabinet members or national policies approved. He'll need to address the concerns of a population that ranges from those who seek modernization to those who follow an ultraconservative form of Islam.

It will be an inspiration if Karzai and his advisers can hold this democratic model together.

All benefit from meth registry
The Leaf-Chronicle,
Clarksville, Tenn.

One of the recommendations of the Tennessee methamphetamine task force — a searchable "Meth Offender Registry" on the Web — has become a reality.

The registry now is available through the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. Searches can be made by name of offender or by county in which the crime took place.

The registry could be a good tool for po-

tential landlords and others who want to ensure that their neighborhoods stay safe. If you find someone who has been convicted of cooking meth in a home in the past, you know who to keep an eye on today.

A safety concern regarding meth is that it is not merely a health threat to those who abuse the drug. It also presents a safety risk to those who are around it.

According to a release from the Washington State Department of Health, "Labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals. Breathing the fumes, and handling substances, can cause injury and even death."

Law enforcement officials in Tennessee hope the embarrassment factor of having one's name on an Internet list of meth offenders also might serve as a preventive measure. That threat probably won't stop most people because criminals have a tendency to believe they never will get caught. But if it helps deter even a few people — and alerts others to potential threats in their neighborhoods — the registry is well worth it.

Definition of 'sin' not relevant
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

A group of area religious leaders recently carried the debate on gay rights to the doorstep of an Eastern conservative evangelical pastor who's taken credit for helping thwart legislation to extend civil rights to gays. But is the debate best framed as one between religious dogmas?

But if it helps deter even a few people — and alerts others to potential threats in their neighborhoods — the registry is well worth it.

While religious convictions may well play a role in attitudes toward legislative proposals, the Legislature is being asked to write law, not Scripture. The question before lawmakers in the session when it begins this month — as it was last year and year after year before that — is not whether homosexuality is a sin but whether it should be legal grounds for discrimination in employment, lending and housing.

It is one thing to privately disapprove — for religious or other reasons — of others' personal behavior, sexual or otherwise. It is quite another for public policy to allow discrimination on those grounds.

Factions fade for new friends
The Buffalo (N.Y.) News

It's an old but good story. Former adversaries make peace, and maybe even forge an unexpected friendship. ...

BY CARL MOORE

Sometimes, though, the story holds a meaning that goes deeper than the mere discovery of an unlikely camaraderie, however uplifting that may be. Sometimes, it has redemptive power that radiates beyond two individuals, to the factions they represent.

It's probably too much to expect that kind of benefit to flow from the friendship that has developed between former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, but it would be a fine thing if it did. The nation's politics have become so vituperative and so unforgiving over the past quarter-century or so that it would do us all good to remember the fundamental truth behind one of the nation's favorite aphorisms: more unites us than divides us.

The election of 1992 may not have been as ugly as last year's unfortunate contest, but it was nasty enough. ... But called to service this year by the current President Bush, the two former leaders not only responded — raising money for tsunami victims in Asia, and hurricane victims on the Gulf Coast, among other duties — but formed a friendship that observers say is real and respectful.

The new friendship ... highlights the artificiality of much of the posturing that passes for governance. And it suggests that if they want it, Americans can have a more respectful and effective government than they have lately been given.

Rain, rain won't go away
San Francisco Chronicle

Last weekend's storm wasn't a Katrina-sized wallop. But the rain, mud and flooded-out roads made the point: We live here with nature's thin permission.

There should be plenty to ponder. Northern California dries out. Preparations for the next storm must be analyzed. The heavy rain will come again.

Though the delta levees withstood the high water, are these aging barriers solid enough? Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., is pushing a federal repair plan to shore up the system. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also pledged to push for improvements. The details, financing and implications for growth, farmers' water use need further thought. But the storms that just ended are a clear reminder of the task ahead. ...

Government can't do it all. Consider the shrug-shoulder attitudes of many residents in Guerneville, flooded out, again, on the lower stretch of the fast-rising Russian River. After repeated high-water storms over the past few decades, some have built homes higher off the ground. Others have purchased flood insurance. ...

With damages estimated in the tens of millions, this storm was big enough. It begs the thought of what a bigger one could do. California must be ready for what comes next.

YOUR MONEY

Market for vacation homes still booming

BY GREG BURNS

Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO — It has six full baths, 259 feet of Lake Geneva shoreline and a price tag that thumps its nose at the recent slowdown in the residential real-estate boom.

For sale at \$10.4 million, this gated mansion complete with boat dock and billiard room is testing the underlying strength of a market that some expect to be the first to cool: second homes.

"It's a fabulous, fabulous house," listing agent Nancy Lehman attests. But it may be too fabulous for the times, some experts say.

As investors cast a wary eye on the housing market, conventional wisdom suggests that such desirable retreats will be early casualties.

Wildly popular in recent years, these mansions, cottages and condos with their scenic views have come under pressure from simple economics, as the run-up in selling prices and interest rates suppress demand for a sought-after luxury.

"The issue is whether we can afford it," said Northern Trust chief economist Paul Kseriel. "It's getting more expensive."

And it's far from a necessity, noted Kenneth Johnson, a Harvard University professor specializing in real estate who considers second homes more vulnerable in a downturn. "It's still a discretionary part of a homeowner's budget."



CHICAGO TRIBUNE/KRT

This gated Lake Geneva, Wis., mansion, complete with boat dock and billiard room, is on the market for \$10.4 million.

Yet despite widespread reports of slowing sales and moderating prices, certain second-home markets could display remarkable staying power. The growing economy is providing what Fannie Mae chief economist David Bernson describes as "underlying strength."

And significant additional support, he said, will stem from an irresistible demographic phenomenon that already has helped make vacation homes and investment property more than one-third of all residential real-estate sales. Demand from baby-boomers as they enter the prime years for second-home purchases is likely to help buoy prices for the next decade and beyond.

It's a theory fleshed out in the research of Kenneth Johnson, a Loyola University demographer who foresees a "tidal wave" of boomers migrating to scenic, rural buyways within striking distance of the metropolitan areas where they currently live.

The sheer scale will buttress the market, Johnson said.

In spots like Oceanside, Calif.; Pompano Beach, Fla.; and Beach Haven, N.J., seasonal homes have become some of the hottest commodities going. Prices have soared along both coasts, as well as in well-known ski areas and resort communities. "You see appreciation in unique areas that are simply irreplaceable," said Peiser.

Just 90 miles from Chicago, Lake Geneva has served as a convenient getaway for generations of well-to-do Chicagoans, and the market remains healthy, said Linda Tongue, a realtor at the local office of Keefe Real Estate.

"You keep hearing the bubble is going to burst," she said. "It's been a really strong market."

Lakefront property values have more than doubled in the past five years, she said, but the rise has been more moderate than, among the trophy properties in the country's Aspen and Palm Beaches.

Troops can now borrow more in home loans

BY LEO SHANE III

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops can now borrow up to \$417,000 in a no-down-payment home loan through the Department of Veterans Affairs, which boosted its loan maximum by 16 percent this month.

Previously the largest loan available through the program was \$359,650.

Two years ago servicemembers could only borrow up to \$240,000 for home purchases.

Keith Pedigo, director of the department's loan guaranty service, said that in 2004 Congress linked the low-interest military loan program to the current conventional loan limits set by federal loan backers, to better reflect the actual cost of owning a home.

That resulted in the \$177,000 jump in the loan maximums over the last two years. Pedigo said under the previous limits many servicemembers were priced out of expensive housing markets such as San Diego and New York.

Linda Johnson, spokeswoman for the National Association of

Realtors, said officials there see the increases as an important boost for veterans and troops.

Many homes in major metropolitan areas would not be affordable to those buyers without the VA loan increase, since housing prices in those expensive markets are already at that \$400,000-plus price tag, she said.

The loan program allows the department to provide a financial guarantee to lenders on a military buyer's behalf, which in turn allows the mortgage company to offer lower interest rates on the loan, even without a down payment.

Most veterans, active-duty troops and reservists are eligible for the loans, Pedigo said.

Pedigo said in the nine months following last year's increase, the department issued 11,900 loans between the old \$240,000 and then-maximum \$359,650.

"That's clear evidence the increase was needed," he said.

"That's 11,900 families who probably could not have made that purchase without the loan increase."

For more information: www.homesloans.va.gov
E-mail: Leo Shane at shane@stripes.osd.mil

2006 brings new ceiling for TSP contributions

BY KENT HARRIS

Stars and Stripes

AVIANO Air Base, Italy — Servicemembers and Department of Defense civilians eligible to put money into the Thrift Savings Plan have even more reasons to do so in 2006.

Perhaps as many as 15,000 reasons.

Changes that took effect Jan. 1 do away with a maximum percentage of pay that people can put into the plan, setting a maximum annual contribution of \$15,000 instead.

Depending on their individual situations, participants can put thousands more dollars into the fund each year, according to Tom Snyder, a financial counselor at the Aviano Family Support Center. They can earn more money than they would in a bank savings account, he said, because the rate of return is better.

He said many servicemembers and civil-

Changes for 2006

Servicemembers and civilians eligible to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan can now contribute a maximum of \$15,000 annually.

The maximum contribution allowable annually to a 401(k) plan has also been raised to \$15,000.

Maximum catch-up contributions for those 51 and older have been raised for both Individual Retirement Accounts (\$1,000) and 401(k) accounts (\$5,000).

— Kent Harris

ians eligible to participate in the plan could also lower their taxes by putting more money in.

"The only time they shouldn't be contributing is if they have bills to pay," Snyder said.

In 2005, participants were limited to contributing a maximum of 10 percent of their base pay to the fund. But that provision has been eliminated.

Those deployed for long stints downrange can contribute even more of the money they earn while deployed, with the maximum annual amount capped at \$44,000.

"Those are probably the two biggest [changes for 2006]," Snyder said.

But there are others.

Chris Bruce, a financial consultant at Global Credit Union, said while the maxi-

mum annual contributions to Individual Retirement Accounts remain the same at \$4,000, the amount of additional money those over 50 can put in has doubled to \$1,000. Referred to as catch-up contributions, that means someone 51 or older could put in \$5,000 a year.

The annual contribution ceiling for 401(k) plans has risen as well to \$15,000, up \$1,000 from a year ago. Catch-up 401(k) contributions for those 51 or older have jumped \$1,000 to a maximum of \$5,000. There are eligibility requirements for both catch-up contributions.

Bruce said some things haven't changed, though.

"If you've got a diversified portfolio and you're putting money into it on a regular basis, that's the best condition you can have for financial success," he said.

Bruce said servicemembers should routinely monitor their investments and watch how the economy is doing as well.

E-mail Kent Harris at harris@mail.stripes.osd.mil



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YOUR MONEY

Bad student debt is not passe

Q: My father ran up his credit card and could not pay the debt. He was in his 90s and had dementia. I had nothing to do with this debt and was not a joint user with any of his cards, but I've been dealing with collection agencies for more than three years. I can not make them understand that Dad had no money and died with no assets. I even had one person tell me I had a moral obligation to pay this bill. When one company cannot collect, they send the account to another. How can I get these people to leave me alone?

A: The collector who lectured you about morality demonstrated remarkable gall, given that you clearly have no responsibility, legal, moral or otherwise, for this debt.

Debt expert Gerri Detweiler recommends that you send a letter — certified mail, return receipt requested — telling the latest collection agency to stop contacting you. Make it clear that your dad died without assets and that you are not responsible for his debts, said Detweiler, who runs a Web site on credit (www.UltimateCredit.com). You might point out that continued at-

tempts to collect the debt would be a violation of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

If you're contacted again, consider paying a couple hundred bucks to hire an attorney to write a similar letter. Some ethically challenged collectors need the threat of a lawsuit before they'll back off.

Q: I am a college student at a public university and will be graduating with a bachelor's degree in the spring. I will have about \$25,000 in debt from student loans and \$4,500 in credit card debt. (I had no credit card debt until this summer, when I had a car accident and major car problems.) I plan on attending graduate school in the fall. This will probably add \$25,000 to my student loan debt.

A: After I graduate I should be making about \$65,000, but I feel like I will never be able to get ahead of the bill. I've been reading articles about people graduating with this much debt and not paying it off until they are 50. Is

there anything I can do to remedy this situation?

A: Making student loan payments until you're 50 isn't the worst thing in the world, particularly if the payments are affordable, you're locked in a low rate and your interest payments are tax deductible (which they typically are). Your total debt will be less than what you expect to make your first year out of school, which is a reasonable limit for student loan borrowing.

Your credit card debt is another issue. You need to get rid of that before it gets any worse, and set up an emergency fund so life's inevitable setbacks don't send you spiraling into debt. Consider taking a semester or more off to work a full-time job, pay off your cards and build up your emergency fund. Once you're back in school, get at least a part-time job so you won't have to rely on plastic to cover your living expenses.

Q: I have unpaid credit card debt from five years ago that's

still showing on my credit report. How do I get this removed? I live in California and the statute of limitations is four years. Can I just call the credit bureau or do I need an attorney?

A: You've confused the statute of limitations for debt collection — the time in which a creditor can sue you over a debt — with the limits on how long negative information can be reported about you to the credit bureaus.

Each state has different statutes of limitations for debt, and you're correct that California's is generally four years. That doesn't mean you no longer owe the money. It means that if you're sued over the debt, you can show up in court and point out that the statute of limitations has expired. The collector won't then be able to win a judgment against you or garnish your wages.

Credit reports, meanwhile, are governed by federal law, which says most negative marks must be removed after seven years. (Bankruptcies can be reported for 10 years.)

If your report contains negative marks older than those limits, you can write the credit bureaus to ask that they be deleted.

Li Pulumma Weston is the author of the new book "Deal With Your Debt: The Right Way to Manage Your Bills and Pay Off What You Owe." Send questions to 3540 Laurel Canyon Blvd., No. 238, Studio City, Calif. or visit <http://www.liweston.com>. Distributed by No More Red Ink.

Airlines' winter fares prior to past

FORT WORTH, Texas — Airlines have unleashed a spate of discount fares this week as they try to drum up business during the slow winter months, but travelers might need to search a little harder this year for the best post-holiday bargains.

Carriers typically offer fare sales once the new year begins as travel demand slows until spring. Several major carriers have started fare sales in recent days. American Airlines, for example, announced a sale that includes round-trip fares from Dallas Fort Worth Airport as low as \$208 to Washington, D.C., and \$218 to Los Angeles.

Other carriers beginning sales this week include ATA Airlines, AirTran Airways, Frontier Airlines and United Airlines.

But experts say the fare sales aren't quite as generous this winter as in past years.

"It's not as deep as it was a year ago," said Terry Trippler, an airline analyst with travel site Cheapseats.com who monitors fares.

"There's nothing too exciting there."

Airfares rose steadily last year, driven mainly by high jet-fuel prices and cutbacks in flights. Average fares today are about \$40 higher than a year ago, Trippler said.

From Knight Rider Newspapers

FRIDAY'S MARKET SUMMARY

INDEXES				
	52-week High	Low	Name	
Dow Jones	10,000.65	9,999.99	Dow Jones Industrial	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	Dow Jones Transportation	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
Russell 2000	6,902.51	6,902.51	NYSE Composite	
NYSE	1,381.31	1,381.31	NYSE Composite	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	S&P 500	
Dow Jones	10,000.65	9,999.99	Dow Jones Industrial	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	Dow Jones Transportation	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
Russell 2000	6,902.51	6,902.51	NYSE Composite	
NYSE	1,381.31	1,381.31	NYSE Composite	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	S&P 500	
Dow Jones	10,000.65	9,999.99	Dow Jones Industrial	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	Dow Jones Transportation	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
Russell 2000	6,902.51	6,902.51	NYSE Composite	
NYSE	1,381.31	1,381.31	NYSE Composite	
NASDAQ	2,232.79	2,232.79	NASDAQ Composite	
S&P 500	1,348.36	1,348.36	S&P 500	

NYSE					AMEX					NASDAQ					
Most Active (\$1 or more)					Most Active (\$1 or more)					Most Active (\$1 or more)					
Name	Vol	High	Low	Chg	Name	Vol	High	Low	Chg	Name	Vol	High	Low	Chg	
IBM	36,403	117.25	-25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Verizon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Amazon	1,219	2.4	-0.1	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Apple	1,219	2.4	-0.1	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Oracle	1,219	2.4	-0.1	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Yahoo	1,219	2.4	-0.1	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Apple	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Oracle	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Yahoo	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Apple	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Apple	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Oracle	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
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Yahoo	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Microsoft	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
Amazon	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8	Google	47,818	31.25	-0.25	SPDRS	54,609	128.4	+1.8
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Sunday Horoscope

Mars and Jupiter are playing tug of war. Jupiter energy encourages us to have eyes and appetites for more than our pocketbooks can accommodate. Mars energy has us believing that whatever the risk is, it's worth going into debt over. The luxury-loving Taurus moon doesn't help matters. Bottom line: Hide your credit cards.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY

(January 8). This year, old conflicts are resolved and new dreams are born. Your easygoing style makes you a favorite among friends, and your social schedule reflects it through the winter. However, when it comes to business, you're not missing around. Investment opportunities this spring require quick decisions. Love with a Virgo or a Pisces is exceptional.

ARIES (March 21-April 19)

Your shining example helps others accept responsibility. You make it look easy. Plus, even if people are able to escape their duties, they won't be able to escape the consequences of their escape. Remind them of this.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)

Your commitment to a project verges on radical. The more you argue with us at least care enough to try to communicate. However, beware of those who avoid the issues altogether.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21)

The big problems are being solved. The little pesky ones are still accumulating. Clear 10 tiny but bothersome tasks from your list, and you'll feel energized again.

CANCER (June 22-July 22)

You can gracefully dodge a potentially boring conversation by resolving not to engage anyone out of obligation. When you choose to connect, it's because you find something genuinely interesting in the other person.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Personal accounts are settled now. This can happen in one truthful conversation. Or, you may decide to wipe someone's slate clean because it's

not worth it to you any longer to give one iota of attention to the debt.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22)

Your people skills are sharp — still, you tend to exaggerate the best traits of those you really like. Don't expect something noble from one who has never been noble before.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23)

Be on the lookout for attractive and interesting people; they are on the lookout for you! Keep close tabs on personal items this afternoon. Simple measures keep you organized, like compiling a million little notes into one list.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21)

Move forward with the living arrangement you want by getting rid of the one you don't want. If you still feel immobilized, an Aquarius or a Leo can help you brainstorm a fresh, winning approach to your rut.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21)

Join someone from another generation to see life and work from a new angle. Innovative ideas are a shot in the arm to your project, but only if you're open-minded enough to apply them.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)

Some would say that this plane of existence is nothing but energy and information. Planets indicate that your energy will be abundant and your information will be reliable, so you're blessed with the best of luck.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18)

Whimsy can be brilliant, or it can be wasteful. Your intention makes all the difference. Today features a decision that requires you to give the long-term as much consideration as the here-and-now.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20)

You're constantly inventing and reinventing yourself in the eyes of others. You'll finally get a little feedback. Someone you respect pays you a high compliment. Sweet elation.

Creators Syndicate

RESULTS FOR PAGE 23 CROSSWORD

LAPSE	AMBLE	RAMPAGE
ICEAGE	SERIES	IMMOVED
REPROACH	MOTEL	PENDING
ASSAULT	LEON	IRON LIE
HUMANITARIAN	REPAID	
ERA	SOPHIST	ARIA
RIFLE	SWIFT	USSET
GOLF	REPEAT	ANDRUDIN
STEW	DUMB	NAXOS
FUSE		
RECT	RAIN	LEITON
REPAIRING	DIRECTLY	LAUNDRY
ACADIAN	LOWE	SPAS
CARE	CASCA	BORA
ALGER		
EST	HEAT	COUCH
RHYME	TIRE	AFT
ORE		
IBM	DETEST	AUK
DEA		
REPLAYS	ITON	THELINE
ATE	FUN	PELF
IVANI		
THEMOON	REPELS	SALVADOR
SATUPON	BEATIE	SEADATE
ONEWIT	SWEETS	USERTID

Photoshop reversions: a sign of husband's deeper problems

Dear Abby: I have been married for seven years. I was looking for a room on my computer recently and found some pornography my husband had downloaded. What was most shocking was that he had done some computer artwork on some of it, and superimposed my 15-year-old niece's face onto the girl in the picture.

I then went through my husband's things and found a tape from our camcorder. He had hidden it in our bedroom and tried to videotape me after I had gotten out of the shower. I was not surprised. I had caught him trying to tape us having sex without my knowing last year.

I no longer feel comfortable with him physically, and I don't care if we get divorced. I don't care if I can ever trust him again. Is my husband a pervert with a serious problem? We have a son who is almost 4. Is divorce easier when the children are smaller, since they won't remember as much? Please help me. I just don't know what to do.

—Grossed Out in Great Falls
Dear Grossed Out: Your husband has serious problems.

By substituting your niece's face for that of the girl in the picture, he has shown that he

has an incestuous interest in a minor. And by attempting to videotape you during intimate moments without your consent, he has shown that he has no respect for your feelings. If he refuses to get professional help, show the picture to the parents of your niece.

Divorce is never easy on children, but your son will accept it more easily if you do it now rather than when he is older and expects you to explain the reason in logical terms.

Dear Abby: I have six good friends who live together.

When they answer the phone, I never know who I'm talking to. I always say, "This is Vanessa," but they never reply by volunteering their names.

Is it reasonable to expect them to identify themselves? I have considered asking them to, but never have. I'm not sure if it would be presumptuous or not.

—Confused in Columbia, Mo.
DEAR CONFUSED: When you identify yourself, I would think that the response would be, "Oh, hi, Vanessa! It's Julie." How are you? However, since that's not the response you're getting, it's certainly not presumptuous to ask, "and who is this?" Or, "With whom am I having the

pleasure?" That's what I'd do.

Dear Abby: My father lives in another state and drove here to see our new baby girl. He saw her while she was in the nursery at the hospital.

When I returned home from the hospital, my father wanted to come over immediately. I was very tired, and when I suggested that his wife and her son not come along, he refused to come. Abby, their boy screams and is out of control most of the time, and I didn't want him disrupting my two other children.

Was I wrong to ask that just be my dad? It has been eight months since he has been down here, and I don't know what to do. Should I apologize?

—Frazzled Mother in North Carolina
Dear Frazzled: It couldn't hurt to offer an apology.

Your father considers his wife and stepson to be part of your family, too, and probably didn't recognize how disruptive this child can be.

In the interests of family harmony, and before this festers any further, pick up the phone and call.

Letters for this column — with your name and phone number — should be addressed to Dear Abby, P.O. Box #9440, Los Angeles, CA 90009. Write Abby on the Internet at <http://www.advicegoddess.com>. Dear Abby is a Universal Press Syndicate.

When the going gets stuffed, grooving a spinning beat move

My boyfriend of seven months, who's 43, just moved in with me. Several days ago, he unpacked his "stuffed animal collection," which consists of 12 teddy bears given to him by ex-girlfriends, and perched them all on the top of my bed. I'm pretty sure he's bothering me. Some of them say things like "Love Margie" or "Happy Valentine's Day, baby."

Invaded Who knew in-your-face hostility could be so funny and cute. But, there it is, abiding. I'm a pretty little teddy bear in a little motorcycle jacket and a tiny scarf and goggles on the teenage girl's bedspread that used to be your living room couch.

At what point do you stop parsing how petty is too petty so you can unzip your skin and run away screaming? Now, to be fair, I have a friend who's into stuffed animals. Her name is Sophie, and she's 7. Your boyfriend, on the other hand, is a gaudy man — somebody who has, uh, shaved, pays taxes and will soon get prostate exams — and he collects teddy bears? And, no, he didn't amass all 12 by accident, with each girlfriend arriving at the bed herself. "Whoops. I have yet to buy my big, hairy, adult male boyfriend a stuffed toy!" Personally, I'd be less creeped

out by a boyfriend with a collection of brains in Mason jars (providing he mail-ordered them from Body Parts 'R' Us and didn't just help himself to parts gifts from my predecessors). But, there you are, neck-deep in Edgar Allan Poe meets Winnie The Pooh, wondering whether you're being fair.

Advice Goddess What, exactly, is a deal-breaker for you? A guy who brings his mom on dates? One who wears flip-flops, and not because he leaks? Or are you more of a classicist, drawing the line at a guy who keeps his mother's skeleton in the attic, dresses up in her clothes, and runs around waving a big knife to a Bernard Herrmann soundtrack?

If somebody's a work jack and we all are on some level, the least they can do is be discreet — especially if their particular brand of wack involves a retrospective of their ex-girlfriends in stuffed-animal form. Your boyfriend could have a secret cache of teddy bears at his storage space, complete with a little altar that lights up, and a tiny table and chairs where he and the bears can have naked tea parties. Unless he's the kind of a mis-ménagerie a twelfth in your living room — probably because reminding you and himself of Margie

and friends is the point.

Amens, the poor dear, he must not have gotten the right kind of mommying as a child. Why should he sweat the abandonment issues now, when it's so much easier to shove this caddy-daddy wall in his face?

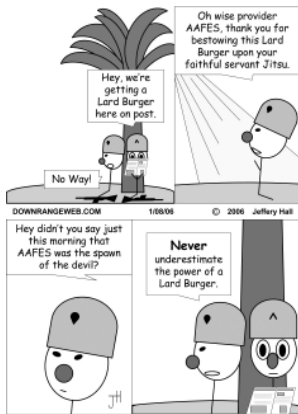
Maybe, if you can get him to suck his thumb in some therapist's office, he might someday join you in an adult relationship. Then again, maybe your energy would be better spent on your own behavioral shortcomings, lest you find yourself asking the next guy in your life, "Shall I clear a wall for a photo gallery of your former girlfriends?" Feel that long lumpy strip down the center of your back? That's a spine, waiting to be used — whenever somebody motions you to remain prone so they can more conveniently wipe their feet on your back.

It's hard enough coming to a respectable compromise with a boyfriend who wants to hang his neon Bud sign in your French country living room. When a guy decorates in Early Ex-Girlfriend, where do you even start? My suggestion: Call up the Playkoolz, and see if they've got room for a large, unshaven child with 13 stuffed bears.

Got a problem? Write Amy Alkon, 171 Pier Ave. No. 280, Santa Monica, CA 90405, or e-mail AdviceGoddess@aol.com (www.advicegoddess.com). Copyright 2005 Amy Alkon. Creators Syndicate.

more stuff

Downrange



Downrange, which is drawn by Jeffery Hall, also appears in Wednesday's editions of Stripes. Check out the Web site: www.downrange.com.

Ricky's Tour



Ricky's Tour is drawn by Mike Jones, an enlisted Navy Journalist. Email: rickystour@yahoo.com

Girls & Sports



Girls & Sports is penned by Andrew Feinstein and Justin Borus. Email: creators@girlsandsports.com

AD REPS BY JOE DIPIETRO / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

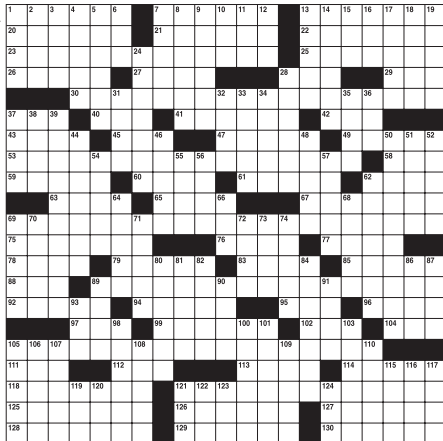
ACROSS

- 1 Failures
- 7 Strolled
- 10 Mob action
- 20 Football facilitator
- 21 Annual October event, with "the"
- 22 "That really touched me"
- 23 Scene of some disgraceful one-nighters?
- 25 Traffic caution
- 26 Longtime Syrian president
- 27 Singer Redbone
- 28 Business honcho Perelman, who was once the richest man in America
- 29 Bad testimony
- 30 Headline about a philanthropist's settled loan?
- 37 Several periods
- 40 Bribe
- 41 Vacationer's destination
- 42 Rudy's coach in "Rudy"
- 43 Take off (on)
- 45 Wife of Saturn
- 47 Like a piece of cake
- 49 "That'll do, thanks again?"
- 53 "I'll say it again—I'm outta here!"
- 58 A
- 59 Sews
- 60 Slow

- 61 Largest island in the Cyclades
- 62 It may blow when it's hot
- 63 Prefix with angular
- 65 Pour
- 67 Made privy to
- 69 Darning some smelly socks?
- 75 Early French settler in the Maritimes
- 76 "Oxford Blues" star, 1984
- 77 Fitness centers
- 78 Metaculousness
- 79 "Julius Caesar" role
- 83 When repeated, a South Seas getaway
- 85 Tattered Tom's creator
- 88 D.C. setting
- 89 Item on a busboy's to-do list?
- 92 Donne, for one
- 94 Spent
- 95 Behind
- 96 Bygone time
- 97 Notebook maker
- 99 Can't stand
- 102 Diving bird
- 104 Grp. with some crack staff
- 105 Retrieves a phone message again?
- 111 Had something
- 112 Kicks
- 113 Ill-gotten gains

DOWN

- 1 Bologna bread, once
- 2 First-rate
- 3 Perks (up)
- 4 Skater Hughes
- 5 Moving experience?
- 6 Makes waves
- 7 Bloodless
- 8 Recounted account
- 9 "The Professor: A Tale" novelist
- 10 Turned on
- 11 Clown's foot spec, maybe
- 12 Cable alternative
- 13 Wisconsin college town
- 14 Egyptian god of the universe
- 15 Mid-millennium year
- 16 Curse
- 17 Walled city near Madrid
- 18 Contents of lamps, maybe
- 19 Just beat
- 24 Played pat-a-cake
- 28 Blue
- 31 Secure
- 32 ___ mgr.
- 33 Actor Atkinson, player of Mr. Bean
- 34 "The Faerie Queen" character
- 35 Faerie land
- 36 One of TV's Ewings
- 37 Work units
- 38 Go wild
- 39 Opening-night celebration
- 44 Md. town near Baltimore
- 46 Reject
- 48 Fair tale character
- 50 "O.K. by me"
- 51 TV journalist David
- 52 Minute
- 54 PC character system
- 55 Slate, e.g.
- 56 Put ___ on (go for at auction)
- 57 ___ directed
- 62 "It's about time!"
- 64 Bit of evidence
- 66 Frequent English football score
- 68 Late name in rap
- 69 Toy on a track
- 70 Online shoppers might use it
- 71 Unusable
- 72 Gen. ___ E. Lee



- 73 Old draft category
- 74 ___ Buena, Calif.
- 80 Came home dusty?
- 81 "Put it here."
- 82 "It's about time!"
- 84 Bit of evidence
- 86 Frequent English football score
- 88 Late name in rap
- 69 Toy on a track
- 70 Online shoppers might use it
- 71 Unusable
- 72 Gen. ___ E. Lee

- 90 Place at the start
- 91 Pin holder
- 93,001 inch
- 98 "Ri-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i-i!"
- 100 City connected to the Sunshine
- 84 Farm plant also called lucerne
- 86 To be over there?
- 87 Mother of Hades
- 89 Country name

- 103 Hibachi chef's pride
- 105 1969 Hoffman role
- 106 Novelist Canin
- 107 Senior Tour golfer Calvin
- 108 Bright
- 109 Someone ___ problem
- 110 Dodge
- 115 Purim month
- 116 Denier's comment

- 117 Hot
- 119 Queen ___
- 120 Across the street from: Abbr.
- 121 N.E.L. ball carriers
- 122 "That's gross!"
- 123 School opening?
- 124 The Fighting Tigers, for short

RESULTS CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 22.

Kovalchuk's showman's trick

With Crosby, nets nat trick

The Associated Press

Ilya Kovalchuk had his sights set on the NHL's most famous rookie and the league goal-scoring lead.

He got them both Friday night. After taking advantage of Pittsburgh's first-year star Sidney Crosby, Kovalchuk went on to complete a hat trick that helped the Atlanta Thrashers to a 6-1 home victory over the Penguins.

Kovalchuk has 30 goals, one more than Philadelphia's Simon Gagne, who scored his 29th in the Flyers' 3-1 victory at Washington. Kovalchuk celebrated by sliding along the ice on one knee, pumping his fist.

"You are always excited when you score a hat trick," he said. "There are not too many chances in your career."

Kovalchuk took a moment in this his third NHL season to teach the teenager Crosby a lesson. The pair also jabbed and gabbed at each other in several test exchanges.

After his second goal, which came after Crosby was sent off with his second slashing penalty of the game, Kovalchuk turned and pointed a finger toward Crosby by stepping back on the ice.

Gagne has benefited greatly by playing on a line with Peter Forsberg. That helped him enter Friday with a one-goal advantage over Kovalchuk, but he ended the night in second place.



Roundup

He isn't complaining.

"It's fun what's going on right now," Gagne said. "The puck keeps going in."

Mike Rathje also scored for the Flyers, who improved to 7-0-1 on their team-record, 11-game road trip. Their only loss in that stretch was a shootout defeat last Saturday in Washington.

Philadelphia, which beat the New York Rangers in overtime on Thursday night, was won three straight and eight of 10.

Hurricanes 4, Islanders 3: At Raleigh, N.C., Cory Sullivan scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period to lead the Hurricanes.

Kevin Adams, Rod Brind'Amour and Justin Williams also scored for the Southeast Division leaders, who won the last three games of a four-game homestand.

Eric Godard scored for the Islanders, who will host Carolina on Saturday.

Stillman extended his point streak to 10 games with his 13th goal. Cam Ward finished with 28 saves in the victory.

New York's Wade Dubielewicz

made 31 saves in his first NHL start this season and his fourth career game.

Red Wings 3, Predators 1: At Nashville, Tenn., Detroit defenseman Nicklas Lidstrom scored two power-play goals.

It marked the first time this season that the Predators lost in regulation to a Central Division team. The Red Wings are 13-1 against teams in their division and led second-place Nashville by six points.

Vernon Fiddler gave Nashville a 1-0 lead with his third goal in two games.

Stars 4, Mighty Ducks 3 (SO): At Dallas, Anni Miettinen scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lift the Stars.

Brenden Morrow scored two regulation goals for the Stars, one short-handed, and Miettinen also had a goal as Dallas rallied from a three-goal deficit.

Teemu Selanne had a power-play goal and an assist for Anaheim, which has lost all four meetings with Dallas this season.

Flames 4, Maple Leafs 0: At Calgary, Alberta, Tony Annonte scored the only goal and Mikikka Kiprusoff made 27 saves for his NHL-leading sixth shutout as the Flames ended Toronto's six-game winning streak.

Kiprusoff earned his sixth win in a row and league-best 22nd. He made 11 saves in the third period.



Dallas Mavericks forward Dirk Nowitzki, right, is fouled by Denver Nuggets forward Timothe Moussa while going up for a shot during the first quarter of Friday's game in Denver. Dallas won in overtime.

NHL scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Philadelphia	22	12	6	50	134	114
N.Y. Rangers	22	17	7	51	256	206
New Jersey	19	18	6	43	113	111
N.Y. Islanders	18	20	2	38	127	146
Pittsburgh	11	29	11	34	158	188

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Ottawa	29	15	9	69	166	93
Buffalo	27	12	2	56	134	121
Washington	25	19	6	54	158	128
Montreal	19	26	6	42	113	130

Northwest Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	19	19	6	46	148	129
Tampa Bay	21	18	3	46	124	129
San Jose	19	20	3	41	131	133
Florida	16	23	6	38	113	135
Phoenix	13	29	6	30	109	154

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Detroit	22	12	6	50	134	114
Nashville	22	17	3	51	256	206
Chicago	18	20	4	40	134	144
Columbus	15	27	2	32	95	145
St. Louis	12	27	7	29	85	145

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Calgary	25	12	4	54	109	102
Vancouver	22	14	5	49	134	129
Edmonton	19	18	5	43	134	129
Minnesota	18	24	4	42	117	104

Northwest Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Los Angeles	27	14	5	54	109	102
Dallas	22	14	5	49	134	129
Phoenix	20	19	2	42	117	104
San Jose	18	24	4	42	117	104

Friday's games

Atlanta @ Philadelphia	4, N.Y. Islanders 1
Carolina @ Washington	2, Dallas 1
Detroit @ Nashville	1, 2
Florida @ Anaheim	3, 2
Calgary @ Toronto	0, 1

Saturday's games

Florida @ N.Y. Rangers	1, 2
Montreal @ Montreal	1, 2
Columbus @ Colorado	1, 2
St. Louis @ Boston	1, 2
Toronto @ Edmonton	1, 2
San Jose @ Pittsburgh	1, 2
New Jersey @ Buffalo	1, 2
Atlanta @ Vancouver	1, 2
Anheim @ Minnesota	1, 2
Calgary @ San Jose	1, 2
Los Angeles @ San Jose	1, 2
Florida @ Washington	1, 2

Dallas at Detroit

Nashville at Chicago

Columbus at Philadelphia

Dallas at Minnesota

St. Louis at Colorado

Los Angeles at Anaheim

Flyers, Capitals 1

Philadelphia 2, Washington 1 (OT)

Washington 2, Detroit 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Buffalo 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Carolina 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Florida 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, San Jose 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Tampa Bay 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Phoenix 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Los Angeles 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, St. Louis 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Dallas 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Chicago 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Columbus 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Detroit 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Nashville 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Minnesota 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, St. Louis 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Los Angeles 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, San Jose 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Tampa Bay 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Phoenix 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Los Angeles 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, St. Louis 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Dallas 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Chicago 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Columbus 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Detroit 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Nashville 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Minnesota 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, St. Louis 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Los Angeles 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, San Jose 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Tampa Bay 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Phoenix 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, Los Angeles 1 (OT)

Philadelphia 2, St. Louis 1 (OT)

Power-play opportunities—Pittsburgh 3 of 7; Atlanta 2 of 5.

Goalies—Philadelphia, Thibault (9 shots-6 saves); Flyers 5-3 (10/27 first, 22-20, Atlanta 1-0 (10/27).

Penalty minutes—11-6-6-3-26.

Shots on goal—Philadelphia 10-15-33.

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Mavericks slip past

Nuggets in overtime

By EDIE PELLIS

The Associated Press

by the way Denver stayed alive.

Anthony (28 points) was so close to the line on his game-tying three-pointer that referee Dick Bavetta had to go to the video to make sure his foot wasn't touching the paint. After about 60 seconds, Bavetta signaled the shot was worth three and the teams played on.

Dirk Nowitzki made a pair of clutch jumpers in the overtime to keep the Mavericks ahead. Nowitzki and Jason Terry led the Mavs with 27 points apiece.

Nowitzki's second big shot, a 16-footer after he got open off a head fake, put the Mavs up 112-109 and put the Nuggets into desperation mode with only 8.5 seconds left and no timeouts.

Miller got the ball and got fouled. He hit his first free throw, then tried the 1-in-100 play, intentionally missing the free throw and hoping for a tip-in. Martin did just that to tie it with 3.6 seconds left.

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Appleby defies odds and wind, leads Mercedes

BY DOUG FERGUSON
The Associated Press

KAPALUA, Hawaii — The scenery suggests a vacation in paradise. The golf was all work Friday in the Mercedes Championships as defending champion Stuart Appleby survived 35 mph gusts for a 1-under 72 to take a one-shot lead into the weekend. The trade wind was among the fiercest since this season-opening event moved to Kapalua in 1999, but the name atop the leaderboard should look familiar. Appleby is trying to become the first player in nearly 50 years to capture the winners-only tournament three straight times.

But it hasn't been easy. He hit his tee shot into the knee-high weeds on the 18th hole and made a bogey, finishing his two rounds at 3-under 143. He won the last two years with scores of 21 and 22 under par.

"If anyone gets to double figures, that would be excellent golf," Appleby said.

David Tomis missed a 6-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole that would have pulled him even with Appleby, settling instead for an even-par 73 to join U.S. Open champion Michael Campbell (72) former U.S. Open champion Jim Furyk (72) and three-time major champion Vijay Singh (74) at 2-under 144.

That kind of pedigree shows what type of golf is required. "It's good practice for the [British] Open," Campbell said.

Sergio Garcia (74) and Olin Browne (76) were the only other players to survive par on a Plantation course using lightning-quick greens moved to warp speed when the gusts were at a peak.

It was a rude reminder that coming to Hawaii doesn't make this a working vacation.

The course average was 75.5, the toughest round in the eight-year history at Kapalua, and the wind is responsible for most of that. Appleby figured the wind alone made the course as many as five shots harder.

"It's more of a grind," he said. "You have to work harder to put a score on the card. There's no real run of birdies."

The best he could manage was birdies on Nos. 14



Michael Campbell puts his head down while lining up his putt on the 18th hole Saturday in the Mercedes Championships. Campbell bogeyed the hole.

and 15, the latter a wonderful wedge out of thick rough that rolled to within a foot of the cup on the par 5. That gave him a two-shot lead, and the Aussie had thoughts of making it even larger until his tee shot went too far left and dove into the thick weeds on 18.

As for his success at Kapalua? "I wish I could tell you some secret," he said. "Maybe I pick the right club more often. Every year it comes down to one shot. It's not like I'm six shots clear."

Fifteen players were within five shots of the lead. Singh, the highest-ranked player in the field at No. 2 in the world, overcame a double bogey with tough par putts and birdies on the last two par 5s.

Garcia also made birdie on the last hole, although his 74 was the first time in four years he failed to break par.

The course average was nearly a half-stroke higher than the first round in 2000, although Brad Faxon didn't need any statistics to figure that out.

Faxon and Jason Gore were the first to play, and the first to discover the fright of 35 mph gusts that made the Pacific Ocean below dance with white caps. Neither of them made a birdie on the first nine holes, and they combined to play the front nine in 84.

When they finished, Faxon saw a leaderboard with only four players under par.

"It's like a U.S. Open, isn't it?" he said after three birdies on the back nine helped him shoot 68. "That's as tough as it gets. If you shoot par today, that's a hell of a round."

Islanders' Godard suspended for punch

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eric Godard of the New York Islanders was suspended for two games by the NHL on Saturday for punching Carolina Hurricanes forward Justin Williams.

The suspension called for him to miss Saturday's game home against Carolina and Tuesday's game against Nashville. He will lose more than \$4,600 in salary, which goes to a players' assistance fund.

During the first period of Carolina's 4-1 victory over the Islanders on Friday night, Williams hit Godard in front of the penalty box and was called for interference. Godard got up and skated across the ice to retaliate.

From behind, he punched Williams in the head. Williams lay on the ice briefly while fans chanted for Godard to be ejected. Godard was called for roughing and charging.

Jays trade Koskie to Brewers

TORONTO — Third baseman Corey Koskie was traded by the Toronto Blue Jays to the Milwaukee Brewers on Friday night for minor league pitcher Brian Wolfe.

Koskie hit .249 with 11 home runs and 36 RBIs in 97 games last season, his first with the Blue Jays after spending the first seven years of his career with Minnesota. He was placed on the disabled list from May 20 to July 26 because of a broken right thumb.

It was the second significant trade between the teams this offseason. The Blue Jays acquired first baseman Lyle Overbay and right-hander Ty Taubenheim from Toronto for right-hander Dave Bush, left-hander Zach Lutz and outfield prospect Gabe Gross during the winter meetings in Dallas last month.

Sports briefs

The Blue Jays also signed a pair of expensive free agents during their busy offseason: starting pitcher A.J. Burnett and reliever B.J. Ryan.

D-backs agree to deal with top draft pick Upton

PHOENIX — Justin Upton, the 18-year-old shortstop who was the top pick in the 2005 major league amateur draft, agreed to a minor league contract with the Arizona Diamondbacks that includes a \$6.1 million signing bonus payable over five years.

Arizona announced the agreement Friday and said Upton will be introduced during a news conference Monday. The signing bonus is the largest in a minor league contract for a drafted player. Upton was not a free agent, topping the \$5.3 million outfielder Joe Borcherd that when he signed with the Chicago White Sox in July 2000.

"This is a significant step for our organization and we look forward to seeing this talented young man in uniform," general manager Josh Byrnes said.

Red Sox, Snow agree to one-year deal

BOSTON — First baseman J.T. Snow and the Boston Red Sox agreed to a \$2 million, one-year contract on Friday.

The deal was announced late Friday night after Snow snapped a physical.

A six-time Gold Glove winner from 1995 to 2000, Snow spent the past nine seasons with San Francisco. He is likely to share playing time at first base with Kevin Youkilis in Boston.

Vick: Leg stomping, traffic citations end college career

VICK, FROM BACK PAGE

The last straw came Friday, even as Beamer was preparing to offer Vick the option of accepting a two-game suspension or deciding to leave Virginia Tech.

A fax sent to Steger's office disclosed that Vick had been stopped for driving 38 mph in a 25 mph zone and driving with a revoked or suspended license on Dec. 17.

Vick had told Beamer about the ticket for driving on a suspended license on Dec. 19, Beamer said, but had never mentioned to anyone that he'd also been caught speeding.

Vick's license had been taken away August 2004 when he was cited for reckless driving and marijuana possession, but had been reinstated until a friend driving a car owned by Vick was pulled over and found to not have insurance, Beamer said.

Vick, who said before the Hokies' 35-24 comeback victory in the Gator Bowl that he planned to return to Virginia Tech, entered this season knowing he would

face hostility from opposing fans, mostly stemming from his drug arrest and another conviction for serving alcohol to underage girls during the 2003 school year.

He said he was ready for it, but reacted to chants of "rapist" and "child molester" at West Virginia by making an obscene gesture in the direction of the crowd on Oct. 1, drawing a meeting with Beamer that resulted in Vick apologizing to the team.

In the ACC championship game hosted at Florida State, he drew an unsportsmanlike conduct flag for spiking the ball after a touchdown run with the Hokies trailing, and walked by reporters after the game without commenting, saying he didn't have to.

For the season, Vick was runner-up to Wake Forest's Chris Barclay for offensive player of the year in the ACC, and was the first team quarterback on the all-conference team.

He finished his career at Tech having thrown for 2,868 yards with 19 touchdowns and 15 interceptions. He also ran 184 times for 492 yards and six touchdowns.

Marcus Vick timeline

A timeline of Marcus Vick's troubles since he enrolled at Virginia Tech in 2002:

Sept. 2, 2003

Suspended for one game by coach Frank Beamer for undisclosed reason.

Feb. 17, 2004

Arrested without incident and charged with four misdemeanors — three for allegedly allowing the underage girls to have alcohol and one for allegedly having sex with a 15-year-old at a January party.

Released on \$2,500 bond.

May 14, 2004

Convicted of three counts of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and sentenced to 30 days in jail and fined \$2,250. Found innocent of having sex with the 15-year-old.

July 6, 2004

Charged with reckless driving and possession of marijuana after a traffic stop about 25 miles east of Richmond at 2:30 a.m. Police said he was clocked at 86 mph, 21 mph above the speed limit, and that the vehicle struck a marijuana.

Indefinitely suspended from football team for off-field problems.

Aug. 3, 2004

Suspended from the university for the 2004 season on same day he pleads guilty to reckless driving and no contest to marijuana possession in New Kent. Is fined \$300, has driver's license suspended for 60 days and is placed in a first offender program on the marijuana charge, requiring

that he perform 24 hours of community service, undergo drug counseling and random drug tests, and give up his driver's license for six months.

Sept. 13, 2004

In plea deal, pleads no contest to one misdemeanor count of contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Receives 30-day suspended jail sentence, is fined \$100, ordered to perform 24 hours of community service and stay away from the teenage girls.

Jan. 17, 2005

Cleared to rejoin football team and re-enroll at Virginia Tech.

Oct. 1, 2005

Leads No. 3 Hokies to 34-20 victory at West Virginia. Makes obscene gesture to fans who have been calling him names related to past problems throughout the game. He apologized a day later.

Dec. 17, 2005

Pulled over by police in Hampton for driving 38 mph at a 25 mph zone and driving with a suspended license.

Jan. 2, 2006

Leads Virginia Tech to a 35-24 win over Louisville in Gator Bowl. The NCAA has stomped on the left calf of Cardinals All-American defensive end Elvis Dumervil. The NCAA sacks leader.

Claims the incident was accidental and that he apologized to Dumervil, who denies ever receiving apology.

Jan. 6, 2006

Is kicked off team at Virginia Tech for legal trouble and unsportsmanlike conduct in Gator Bowl.

The Associated Press

Bears' Smith is Coach of the Year

Former defensive coordinator key to Chicago's turnaround

BY BARRY WILNER

The Associated Press

Lovie Smith was hired to resurrect a proud franchise in Chicago.

He did such a strong job in 2005 that he was chosen The Associated Press NFL Coach of the Year on Saturday.

And he bested out his mentor, Indianapolis coach Tony Dungy, for the honor.

In his second season as Bears coach, Smith guided them to the NFC North title with a 11-5 record, earning a first-round playoff bid. Chicago had the league's stingiest defense, which figures because Smith made his reputation as a defensive mastermind, first in Tampa Bay under Dungy, then in St. Louis.

Now, he oversees a team that surged from 5-11 in his first year to a Super Bowl contender, armed with a defense that allowed only 202 points, just 61 of those at home.

"There are growing pains in anything worthwhile that I've seen," Smith said. "We definitely learned a lot from that experience last year. We definitely appreciate it right now."

"Our team having that bye week getting ready for this play-off game, I'm really excited about that. I'm also excited about the job our coaches were able to do. Our assistant coaches did a super job. Time, we are the team of the year."

If they aren't, then Dungy's



Briefs

Colts might be. Smith drew 24½ votes from a nationwide panel of 50 sports writers and broadcasters who cover the NFL. Dungy was ninth with 20½.

Smith, who served as Dungy's linebackers coach from 1996-2000 in Tampa, recently attended the funeral of James Dungy, his close friend's oldest son, who died last month. Their bond remains strong and Smith often has credited Dungy with helping develop his leadership skills.

Bears general manager Jerry Angelo also worked for the Buccaneers.

"Love, when we went out and started our search for a head coach, it starts with leadership," Angelo said. "And (with) Lovie there've never been any doubts about that. I knew that firsthand. I had the benefit of working with him down in Tampa and saw that come to fruition even more so now that he's in charge."

Smith, who moved from defensive coordinator of the Rams to the Bears, chose Ron Rivera to coordinate the defense, but remains heavily involved with a unit sparked by Defensive Player of the Year Brian Urlacher. Chicago gave up 24 points in a loss to Cincinnati in Game 3, but otherwise

never yielded more than nine points at Soldier Field in going 7-1 at home.

Rivera has become a prime candidate for some of the head coaching openings this month.

Urlacher, though, thinks Smith deserved the award because of how the offense remained together — an ordinary when quarterback Rex Grossman was hurt in the preseason, then running back Cedric Benson, the fourth overall draft choice, held out, contributed little, and hurt his knee during the season.

"I realize a lot of other teams have had great seasons — when you look at Tony Dungy and they were 14-2," Urlacher said. "Marvin Lewis did a great job at Cincinnati. But you look at what he did with that team."

"Our starting quarterback went down. He had to bring along a rookie quarterback (Kyle Orton) who won 10 games for us. It seems like he always made the right moves."

"When we started out bad, 1-3, he never gave up on us, never changed the way he spoke to the media and to the team. I have so much respect for the guy just because of the way he is, the way he treats everyone."

Smith is the fourth Bears coach to win the award. George Halas, the founder of the franchise, won it in 1963 and '65. Mike Ditka was honored in 1985 and '88. Dick Jauron won in 2001.

A good omen, perhaps, for

Smith: Chicago won the NFL championship in '63 and '85, the first seasons Halas and Ditka, respectively, took the award. The six total Coach of the Year awards are the most for any franchise.

Also receiving votes were New England's Bill Belichick (2), and one each for Seattle's Mike Holmgren, Cincinnati's Lewis and the New York Giants' Tom Coughlin.

San Diego's Mark Schottenheimer was the 2004 winner.

Bills fire five assistants

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Buffalo Bills fired five assistant coaches Friday, capping a tumultuous week that followed a disappointing season.

Head coach Mike Mularkey announced the dismissals of Tim Krumrie (defensive line coach), Don Blackmon (linebackers), Steve Szabo (defensive backs) and Frank Verducci (offensive line). Mularkey also confirmed that offensive coordinator Tom Clements was fired, a move that was reported by The Associated Press earlier this week.

"It is time for a change in taking another step in a different direction," Mularkey said in a statement.

The announcement came a day after the Bills hired Hall of Fame coach Marvin Levy to take over as general manager. Levy replaced Tom Donahoe, who was fired on Wednesday.



Chicago Bears head coach Lovie Smith was named the NFL's Coach of the Year on Saturday, narrowly edging out Indianapolis Colts head coach and Smith's mentor, Tony Dungy.

Mularkey, who has three years left on his contract, was retained despite struggling in his second season in Buffalo.

Krumrie, a former Pro Bowl defensive lineman with the Cincinnati Bengals, and Blackmon had completed their third seasons with the Bills. Clements, Szabo and Verducci joined the team when Mularkey was hired in 2004.

Questions have also been raised about defensive coordinator Jerry Gray's future in Buffalo. Gray's status is expected to be determined after he interviews with the Houston Texans this week-end.

Jets move on after Edwards goes to Chiefs

BY ANDREA ADELSON

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Herman Edwards stopped by the Jets' facility for a short time Friday to collect a few items before going on his way.

Now the Jets join a crowded group searching for a head coach.

The Chiefs and Jets finally agreed to compensation Friday, leaving Edwards free to negotiate with Kansas City to replace longtime mentor Dick Vermeil. The Jets, in turn, will receive a surprisingly low fourth-round pick from Kansas City.

Though Edwards technically remained Jets coach until a new deal with the Chiefs was finished, the organization started the process of replacing him. On their list of candidates are their three top assistants: defensive coordinator Donnie Henderson, offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger and assistant head coach/special teams coordinator Mike Westhoff. Other names include Jim Fassel, Jim Haslet and Mike Sherman.

Chiefs offensive coordinator Al Saunders could be added to the list because of his ties with GM Terry Bradway.

Though there is no timetable to make a hire, the Jets realize they must move quickly because there are so many vacancies. For example, Henderson was interviewed by the Saints in San Antonio.

Despite all the upheaval with the organi-

With Herman Edwards off to Kansas City, the Jets join a large pool of teams searching for a new head coach.

zation, Bradway was unavailable for comment but released a statement.

It appears the Jets got below-market value from the Chiefs, but the situation in Hempstead became untenable for Edwards and the organization. Though owner Woody Johnson told the team in November he wanted Edwards to stay, he made few comments publicly to squelch the rampant speculation the Chiefs wanted his coach.

The idea that Edwards would ask for an extension after going 4-12 may have rubbed some in the organization the wrong way, leaving them no choice but to let Edwards go, no matter the small return. Edwards, who took the Jets to the playoffs three times in five years, is the fourth coach to leave the team without getting fired.

Eagles could be losing more coaches than just Childress

BY ROB MAADDI

The Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Now that Brad Childress has left for Minnesota, the Philadelphia Eagles could be losing a few more coaches.

The Eagles made assistant head coach Marty Mornhinweg offensive coordinator on Friday, but they might have more spots to fill if other coaches join Childress' staff with the Vikings.

Since Childress left the last seven seasons in Philadelphia, Childress might try to fill his staff with current Eagles coaches he knows well and has worked closely with during the team's five-year playoff run from 2000-04.

Quarterbacks coach Pat Shurmur, offensive line coach Juan Castillo, offensive assistant Bill Stuey and linebackers coach Steve Spagnuolo are among the possible candidates to leave for Minnesota.

Childress didn't offer any hints about whom he's targeting during his news conference Friday, but said he has an idea who he wants.

The Eagles would still have time replacing Childress with Mornhinweg, who came to Philadelphia in 2003 after spending the previous two seasons as the head coach in Detroit.

"What a great opportunity. That opportunity comes with great responsibility," Mornhinweg said. "I take that very seriously."

Mornhinweg worked with Childress and

has had input on the offense since joining the Eagles. He previously was the offensive coordinator in San Francisco from 1997-2000. It's unlikely Mornhinweg will make significant changes to Philadelphia's offensive philosophy, though he said he'd like to run the ball more.

"Marty has demonstrated that he is one of the top offensive minds in the game and he's proven that throughout his NFL coaching career," head coach Andy Reid said.

"We're happy to have him on staff for the next three seasons and with that we feel this transition will be seamless for him and for the rest of the coaching staff."

Mornhinweg played a role in bringing wideout Terrell Owens and backup quarterback Mike McMahon to Philadelphia. Owens was kicked off the team in November and McMahon struggled in seven starts for the injured Donovan McNabb.

"The first year with T.O. was as good as you can get. The second year was as bad as you can get. It didn't work and we've moved on," Mornhinweg said. "Mike has proved he's a tough and durable."

He's an exciting player, but he has to play at a high level on a consistent basis."

If other coaches leave, the Eagles would face the same problems they've plagued successful organizations for years. Winning teams often lose their top assistants to head coaching jobs around the NFL.

Though they've been one of the best teams in the league since 2000, the Eagles had lost just one assistant before Childress left.

Parcells decides he'll return to Cowboys

BY JAIME ARON

The Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — When the season ended, Bill Parcells said he needed a little off before deciding whether to keep coaching the Dallas Cowboys.

Instead, he showed up at his office every day this week.

So it wasn't too surprising — although still a relief to most Cowboys fans — when team announced Friday that Parcells had agreed to a new contract that carries through the 2007 season.

"I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to continue what we have started here," Parcells said in a Cowboys statement. "The Cowboys organization has been the fairest of fair to me, and hopefully I can repay them with an improved performance."

The 64-year-old Parcells had a year left on the four-year, \$17 mil-

lion contract he signed in January 2003. He had left his three previous coaching jobs mid-contract and there was speculation he might do it again.

Apparently, he's more eager to continue a turnaround that began with Dallas going 9-7 this season after a 6-10 mark the previous year.

"This is about continuity and building upon the pieces we have in place as an organization and as a football team," Cowboys owner Jerry Jones said. "We aren't where we want to be at this point, but we're definitely moving in the right direction and feel very good about the future."

Dallas is 25-24 under Parcells, counting the postseason. In an 18-year career, he's 163-123, ninth on the career victories list, with two Super Bowl titles.

In three years with the Cowboys, Parcells has enhanced his

reputation as a rebuild, but he still has plenty to accomplish — starting with winning a playoff game.

Terms of Parcells' new contract were not immediately available.

A team spokesman said Jones would have no further comment.

Parcells, who rarely speaks to reporters in the offseason, also was unavailable. His agent, Jimmy Sexton, did not immediately return a phone call to The Associated Press.

Despite having added a year to Parcells' existing deal — and probably giving him a raise, too — Jones could end up in the same will-he-stay-or-will-he-go dilemma after the 2006 season.

Coaches usually work with an extra season on their contracts, partly as leverage with players who might view them as headed out. So even with the extension,

Jones can only count on getting 2006 out of Parcells.

"As I have said for the past three years, I am encouraged by Bill's enthusiasm and determination, and that hasn't changed in any way," Jones said. "From a personal perspective, I have enjoyed every aspect of our working relationship, and I am optimistic about the organization's future."

The makeup of Parcells' staff remains in doubt. Sean Payton, the passing game coordinator and assistant head coach, is a candidate for the vacant head coaching jobs in Green Bay and New Orleans, and defensive coordinator Mike Zimmer is up for the St. Louis job.

As for the roster, Dallas will have to decide whether to keep several veterans who are due roster bonuses. The Cowboys likely will be hunting for several players via free agency, and they have the 18th pick in the draft.

Parcells arrived in Dallas three years ago this week, taking over a club coming off three straight five-victory seasons.

He won 10 games and made the playoffs right away, but lost to Carolina in a wild-card game. After the worst second season of any of his coaching stops, he re-dedicated himself to US, restructuring the team more to his liking, and saw immediate results.

The Cowboys were 7-3 and in the NFC East, then stumbled to a 2-4 finish. They were eliminated from the playoffs about an hour before their finale.

Afterward, Parcells said he needed time to decide whether to return.

"Listen, the NFL season at best is a firing process," Parcells said last week. "When you've been going every day since July 29, every single day, it's tiring for everyone. I've been here for 20 other guys. When I see them on Sunday, they all look tired, too."

Bengals are champs, but here come the Steelers

BY JOE KAY

The Associated Press

CINCINNATI — For nine excruciating years, offensive tackle Willie Anderson went home in January, fired up the grill, watched the NFL playoffs and fantasized about getting there someday.

Turns out, fantasy is nothing like reality.

The Cincinnati Bengals are back in the playoffs for the first time in 15 years, feeling wholly out of place. Not even the weather is following the script, with the temperature above average leading up to the first-round game Sunday against Pittsburgh.

"It's a new feeling for us," said Anderson, who has lost 99 games in 10 Cincinnati seasons. "I always thought it would be freezing and zero degrees right now. That's how I always pictured the week of a playoff game in Cincinnati."

The fans did, too. After 15 years without so much as one winning record, they were convinced that someplace would have to freeze over before the Bengals made the playoffs. When they finally made it, they got another surreal surprise.

The one team that dominated the Bengals at home this season is coming back, looking to do it again. The Steelers (11-5) had some of their best moments during a 27-13 victory on Oct. 23 in a season-high 221 yards on the ground, an emphatic victory over an upstart rival.

The Bengals won a 38-31 shootout in Pittsburgh on Dec. 4 — Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger's first game back from injuries — to essentially win the AFC North title. They even crowded a little bit afterward about how the Steelers were as yesterday as black-and-white television.

The Bengals never thought they'd be playing the Steelers



Cincinnati quarterback Carson Palmer (9), handing off to running back Rudi Johnson (32) during a Christmas Eve game against the Buffalo Bills, makes his first playoff start on Sunday when the Bengals, the AFC North champions, host the Pittsburgh Steelers. It will be the first playoff game in 15 years for the Bengals.

again so soon, with so much at stake — and with so much black-and-gold motivation to make them pay.

"They won our division. It's redemption time," Steelers receiver Hines Ward said. "We get that opportunity, and we feel good because we won in Cincinnati."

That's not all that the Steelers have in their favor. The two cities share a river, but the teams are in their own worlds when it comes to playing games like this one. The Steelers know what to ex-

pect; the Bengals don't have a clue. Only 13 Bengals have been to the playoffs, all with other teams.

The rest have to learn the hard way.

"We've never been in this situation, a lot of guys on the team," receiver T.J. Houshmandzadeh said. "I don't know how I'm going to react, how I'm going to feel lining up in warmups and stretching."

Not so the Steelers. Been there, won that. Forty of them have

been to the playoffs as Steelers, so they know what it's all about.

No one appreciates the value of playoff experience better than Roethlisberger, who led the Steelers to a 15-1 record as a rookie last year, then crumbled during a 41-27 loss to New England in the AFC title game.

The playoff pressure got to him.

"I was worn down," said Roethlisberger, who forced passes and threw three interceptions. "When you get to that point in the season,

you have to be on top of your game. I felt like I was falling off the table. The speed was so much faster that the mistakes are magnified."

Now, Carson Palmer gets to find out. The Bengals quarterback made the Pro Bowl in only his second season as a starter, leading the NFL with 32 touchdown passes and a 67.8 percent completion rate.

He's done far better than anyone expected at this point in his career. He's never experienced anything quite like what comes next, not even winning his last Heisman Trophy career at USC.

"You get the goose bumps going into this week on Monday and Tuesday," Palmer said. "You realize how big of a game it is and how big it is for this city and this organization."

With his Southern California cool, Palmer has handled everything with remarkable calm. He slightly strained his groin on his second-to-last play of a loss to Buffalo, then played only two series as a precaution last week in a loss at Kansas City that sent the Bengals (11-5) into the playoffs on a downward spiral — two bad losses after clinching the division title in Detroit.

Coach Marvin Lewis responded by getting loving. He put his team in pads at midweek and limited the media attention — receiver Chad Johnson couldn't even talk — to get everyone focused.

"I think there was a sense of, 'Wow, we're here!' in Detroit," Lewis said, referring to the division title. "Now we're on something else. I think we were brought back to reality regardless of what happened, and that's good."

The new reality is that the Bengals have to beat an old rival, one with a playoff-sized chip on its shoulder.

"Just given the rivalry that we have — I know that to me is more important," Steelers safety Troy Polamalu said. "We want to be the dominant team in our division, you know what I mean?"



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SPORTS

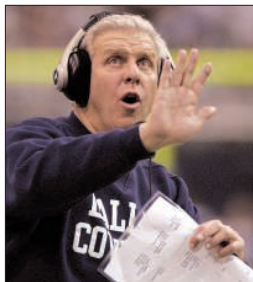


**Bears' Smith edges mentor
Dungy for Coach of the Year
award, Page 29**

Back on top



Lakers guard Kobe Bryant, right, shoots over 76ers forward Kyle Korver on Friday. Bryant returned from a two-game suspension to score 48 points in the Lakers' victory and moved back ahead of Allen Iverson in the NBA scoring race. See Page 27.



**Parcells
will remain
with Cowboys
after signing
extension
through 2007**
Page 30

Vick kicked off ... and up 'to next level, baby'

**Virginia Tech dismisses QB;
He says he'll enter NFL draft**

BY HANK KURZ JR.

The Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia Tech kicked quarterback Marcus Vick off the football team on Friday, prompting the junior quarterback to announce he will follow his brother into the NFL.

Vick, the younger brother of Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick, was dismissed from the Hokies on Friday after a series of legal transgressions — including two traffic violations Dec. 17 that were revealed Friday — and his vicious stamp on an opponent's leg during the Gator Bowl.

The announcement that Vick's Virginia Tech career was over came from university president Charles Steger and was delivered to the player and his mother by Hokies coach Frank Beamer at their Hampton Roads, Va., home.

Vick told The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk on Friday night that he would turn pro.

"It's not a big deal," Vick told the paper when spotted at a Virginia Beach restaurant. "I'll just move on to the next level, baby."

Vick made good on that promise Saturday after consulting with his family.

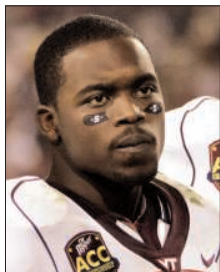
"I have decided to enter the NFL draft," Vick said in a three-paragraph statement released through his lawyers. "I am very excited about this opportunity and look forward to proving my athletic ability at the professional level. I believe I am ready for this challenge and the next chapter of my life."

Vick came under intense scrutiny this week after replays showed he apparently intentionally stamped on Louisville All-American Elvis Dumervil's leg during the Gator Bowl on Jan. 2.

No penalty was called on the play, and Vick did not help himself by claiming it was accidental, even though the frequently shown replay betrayed that claim. He further hurt his cause by claiming to have apologized to Dumervil for the incident, but Dumervil said no such apology ever was offered.

"We have received hundreds of letter from fans and alumni who are disturbed by what they saw," Steger said during a Saturday news conference.

Brenda Boddie, speaking to The Associated Press by phone from her home, acknowledged that her son "did the wrong



Virginia Tech quarterback Marcus Vick was dismissed from the team Friday, the result of numerous legal transgressions and his unsportsmanlike conduct in the Gator Bowl. Vick said he'll enter the NFL draft.

thing" when he stomped on Dumervil. She said she understands why Virginia Tech kicked the dazzling junior quarterback off the team Friday, but resents portrayals of him as a "monster."

"Everybody does stupid stuff when they're 19, 20, 21 years old," she said. "Everybody goes through that. Nobody's perfect. He just did the wrong thing."

Steger suspended Vick after he was cited for reckless driving in August 2004, and warned that no additional transgressions would be tolerated.

"The university provided one last opportunity for Vick to become a citizen of the university and re-admitted him in January 2005, with the proviso that any future problems would result in automatic dismissal from the team," Steger said Friday.

"I can tell you he's deeply hurt, he's deeply saddened," Beamer said during the news conference. "I can assure you this kid is very, very hurt, his mom is very, very hurt and I'm hurting with them. It's a disappointment."

SEE VICK ON PAGE 28

Kovalchuk gets better of heralded rookie Crosby with hat trick Page 26